THE WIRE
ADVENTURES IN MODERN MUSIC
ISSUE 166 · DECEMBER 97 · £2·50 / US $5·50

Neurofunk flavas
Source Direct, Matrix, Optical, Grooverider, No U Turn

Hariprasad Chaurasia
adventures in the raga trade

Bootsy Collins's
jukebox

Cyro Baptista

Company Flow

Tim Berne

La Monte Young *feted*

The Grateful Dead
for beginners

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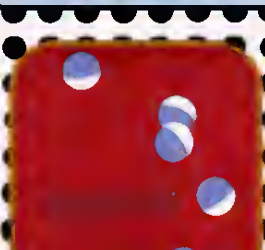

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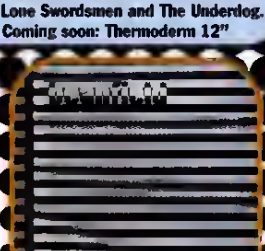

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THE
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45-46 Poland Street · London W1V 3DF · UK
Tel: 0171 439 6422 · Fax: 0171 287 4767
e-mail: *the_wire@ukonline.co.uk*
Website: *http://www.dfuse.com/the-wire*

Editor/Publisher **Tony Herrington**

Deputy Editors **Rob Young, Chris Bohn**
Art Editor **Robin Hawee**

Advertising **Anne Hilde Neset (0171 494 1340)**

Subscriptions **Ben Houee (0171 734 3555)**
Administrator **Ben Farrington**

Words **Jake Barnes, Mike Barnes, Ed Baxter, Clive Bell, Chris Blackford, Philip Brophy, Linton Chiswick, Richard Cook, Christoph Cox, Brian Duguid, Phil England, Kodwo Eshun, Matt ffytche, Louise Gray, Andy Hamilton, Richard Henderson, Steve Holtje, Simon Hopkins, Sasha Frere-Jones, David Keenan, Rahma Khazam, Nick Kimberley, Biba Kopf, Art Lange, Howard Mandel, Peter McIntyre, Andy Medhurst, Will Montgomery, Tim Owen, Ian Penman, Edwin Pouncey, Simon Reynolds, Tom Ridge, Robin Rimbaud, Jonathan Romney, Paul Schütze, Iain Scott, Mike Shallcross, Peter Shapiro, Chris Sharp, Mark Sinker, Paul Stump, David Toop, John L Walters, Ben Watson, Val Wilmer, Barry Witherden**

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Distribution

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Founder **Anthony Wood**

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editor's idea

At the risk of sounding like a character from *The Fast Show*, this month I have mostly been listening to... The Fall Following the announcement of this particular nugget of information, no revelations concerning the music of the Mancunian mavericks in question will necessarily be forthcoming. But bear with me, as a path of sorts might well be beaten through the music of a musician who I also happened to listen to this month, and whose work would appear crucial to certain key developments in late 20th century contemporary music, my opinion of which (this particular musician's music, that is, as opposed to the entirety of late 20th century contemporary music) has perhaps been 'coloured' by recent, continuous exposure to the collected works of Mark E Smith and company

So there I was, in the foyer of the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank, about to experience my first live music for longer than I care to remember If I were a travel writer, I might describe the QEH foyer as a vast, open-plan, formica-clad space with all the personality and conviviality of an airport waiting lounge So any high expectations I might have had regarding this particular night's events were in danger of being slowly crushed upon entering the appointed venue Nevertheless, in about 15 minutes time, Jon Hassell will take to the stage for his first UK appearance in almost a decade, and given his complex, ambivalent relationship with much of the music which your average high-street multimedia megaporium now racks (if they rack it at all, that is) under headings such as Minimalism, Trance, Ambient, Fourth World, New Age, Industrial, Electronica and so on into meaningless category hell, not to mention the fact that Jon hasn't released any new music of his own since the 'controversial' 1994 album *Dressing For Pleasure*, then the opportunity to witness his current music in the flesh was one to be savoured, regardless of the surroundings.

For those of you who remain blissfully unaware of such matters, the release of *Dressing For Pleasure* sent waves of dissent crashing through the Fourth World, as the music it contained diverted the exotic drift of Jon's previous records through a hyperventilating domain of high speed digital edits inspired by Public Enemy records *Dressing For Pleasure* was credited to Jon Hassell & Bluescreen, for tonight's concert Jon was scheduled to appear with a new group, Bluescreen Two, a billing which may well have caused some frothing of the mouth in the ranks of his long term fanbase, which, like all fanbases of musicians doomed to be labelled 'cult artists', can border on the psychotic in both its appreciation and approbation

I own a number of Jon's records, and three years ago I even commissioned him to write an article for this magazine, elaborating on the impact which the release of Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew* had on his own music, but I wouldn't call myself a fan as such I did wonder whether the QEH was the right venue for a concert that potentially could turn into an Ambient block party, but I needn't have worried, for in the three years since the release of *Dressing For Pleasure*, Jon's music has made a marked return to the vaporous atmospheres of such Fourth World-defining records as *Possible Musics* and *Dream Theory In Malaya*

Abstracted onto vinyl or CD, such music can seed in the listener heady notions of faux-ethnography, virtual travel and erotic liaisons, but projected from a stage into the hushed, concert hall ambience of the QEH, and filtered through the blow-dried, technology-driven, California session musician sensibilities of the members of Bluescreen Two, it drifts by, enervated and impersonal

20 minutes into the performance, ennui has descended The musicians appear to be absorbed by a crippled emotional palette During a passage which sounds like a chamber version of Light Of The World's UK jazz funk classic "London Town", I'm thinking I'd have been better off staying at home with my Fall records Not that I have anything against Light Of The World, UK jazz funk or chamber music, you understand But I feel as if I am being granted access to a private conversation between musicians who have lost all sense of perspective on their own work, and how it might relate to an external audience

In the end it doesn't, not to me anyway Which brings me back to The Fall, sort of, as an instance of music which attempts to illuminate the world, rather than disengage from it so thoroughly that it loses all meaning for anyone not involved in its making **TONY HERRINGTON**

The January 98 issue of *The Wire*
Join us, as we rewind through the previous 12 months of underground music activity
On sale Tuesday 23 December

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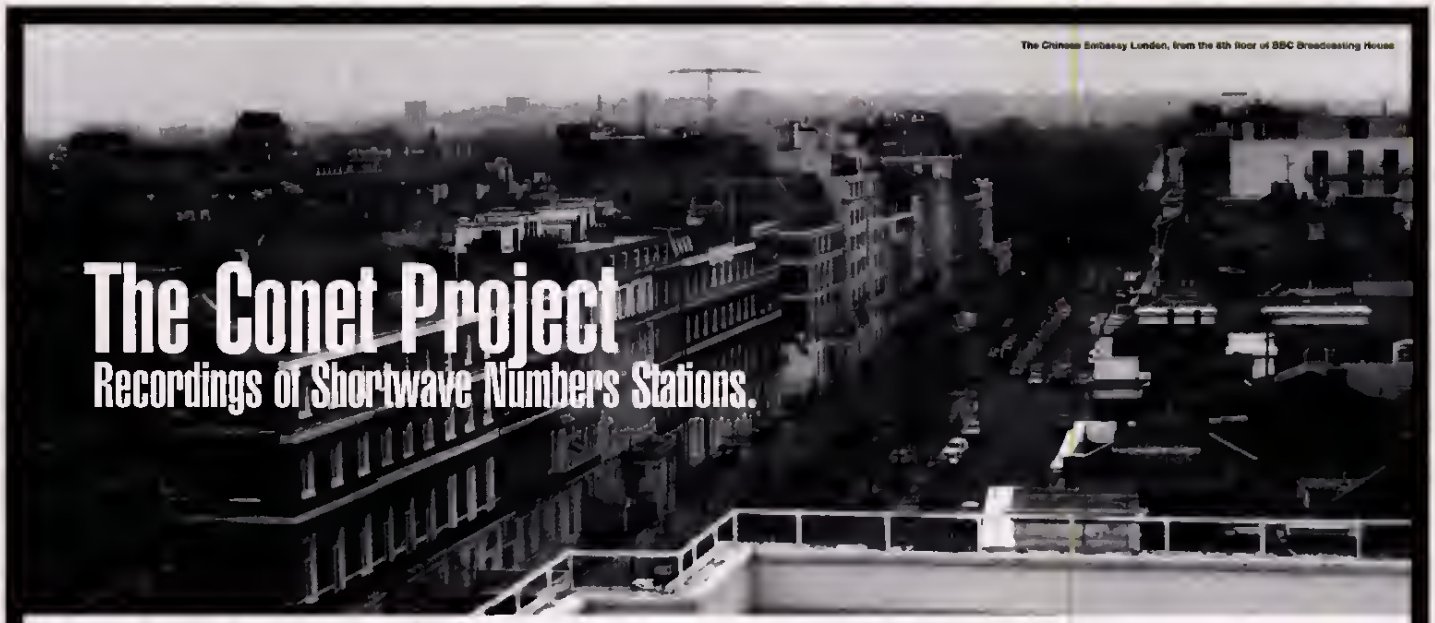

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soundings december

Selected highlights of the month's live events, happenings, club spaces and broadcasts

Festivals/Special Events

Charles Hayward

PHOTO MICHELE TURRIANI

D-Fused Two-night exhibition of new graphic art and design from Web designers Dfuse, AMIO (Association of Music Industry Designers) and New Yorkers Hundredmillionpercent (5 and 12 December) Soundtracking the exhibition of prints, video mixing, slide and computer projections are a choice selection of Electronica DJs and musicians Charles Hayward's Circadian Rhythms, Si-{cut} db and Bit Tonic from The Sprawl Imprint, Elixir, Spongeboy & Tench and Scat Hazard (S), and Fila Brazilia, Tony Thorpe, Friendly Scientist, Tim Germ, Plug Lazonby and Deep Art (Clear Records) Performances will be broadcast over the Net via pirate-radio.co.uk, and all artwork will be viewable at *www.dfuse.com* London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1, 7pm-midnight each night £4/£3, 0171 287 2242

The Risk Factor London arts producers Shinkansen curate this series of events drawing on performers from Bristol, London, Liverpool, Newcastle and Nottingham (10-12 December) The programme includes a composition for Dansette record players by Philip Jeck, plus dance/movement from Assault Event Company (10, 9pm-1am) Bedouin Ascent will be throwing his freeform Electronica shapes on the following night alongside video work by Annis Joslin and Steve Teers (11, 9pm-1am) And there's a double dance bill featuring new work by Fiona Wright and Bristol choreographer Mark Jeffery, both soundtracked live by Ben Ponton of .soviet'france (11-12, 7 30pm) Finally, Mixmaster Morris pools resources with the Hospital Records Sound System and Society Of Light (12, 9pm-1am) Chance your arm at London ICA (Bar & Theatre), £2 50/£2 (Bar, Wed/Thur)/£4 50/£3 50 (Bar, Fri)/£6/£4 (Theatre), 0171 930 3647

The Event Two days of chilled Electronica as part of the rapidly expanding Belfast Festival (29-30 November) The Big Chill host the Saturday night at the Whitla Hall, with music from The J-Knights, and Spacer's five piece group featuring Orbital vocalist Alison Goldfrapp and Juryman, while at the Guinness Spot, you can hear Witchman and local drum 'n' bass duo Stuart Adamson and Dominic Martin (29, 7pm-1am, £15) Sunday at the Whitla sees the Irish debut of Plaid, and a rinse-out courtesy of Boymerang, the Guinness Spot cools down with the wobbly (sound)world of Freeform, plus Bristol's Monk & Canatella (30, 7pm-1am, £12 50) Video backdrops to all events are supplied by Ninja Tune eye-candy vendors Hexstatic £25 gets you a weekend pass to all happenings, info from 01232 665577

Yoko Ono: Have You Seen The Horizon Lately? Major retrospective of the Fluxus founder's art from 1960 to the present, including her early Fluxus pieces and later avant garde film making The exhibition will also feature *AMAZE*, a perspex architectural environment reconstructed for the first time since 1971, and recent photographic work. Regular lecture tours, gallery talks and workshops accompany the exhibition Oxford Museum Of Modern Art, 30 Pembroke Street, 23 November-15 March, £2 50/£1 50 (free Weds 11am-1pm & Thurs 6-9pm), 01865 722733

Tomoko Takahashi Sound based installations sensitive to site-specific environment and acoustics London Beaconsfield, Newport Street, SE11, to 14 December, Friday-Sunday (midday-6pm), 0171 582 6465

Recycling The Future Austrian festival of radio art involving live music, installations, 'telematic jams', lectures and more The long list of those taking part in this ORF (Austrian Broadcasting) event includes Richard Dorfmeister, Rupert Huber, John Oswald, Robin Rimbaud, Mego's Peter Rehberg, Bob Ostertag, Jon Rose, Christof Kurzmann, and Christof Migone Vienna ORF Broadcasting Studios, Argentinierstrasse 30 A, 4-7 December, info on 00 43 1 50101 8277, fax 00 43 1 50101 8065 The whole event will be broadcast live over the ORF Website goto *http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/FUTURE/*

On Stage

BJ Cole The steel guitarist who's added texture to The Orb and John Cale reveals the latest incarnation of his own Transparent Music ensemble Special guest is electric violist Martha Mooke London Water Rats, 13 December, details 0171 837 7269

Nicolas Collins + Kenny Process Team American electronic composer and conceptualist Collins appears in an unspecified UK live performance for the first time in at least three years Support from Beefheartian surf-noisesters KPT and surprise guests London Spitz, 9 December, 8pm, £7/£5, 0171 247 9747

Mat Freeer + Martin Newell + Ayoka The latest in the Union Chapel's Flagrant Nights series features downtempo beats from Fraser, streetwise poetry from Newell, and dance tunes spun by soul diva Ayoka London Union Chapel, 5 December, 8pm, £7/£5, 0171 226 1686

Jan Garbarek & The Hilliard Ensemble The Norwegian saxophonist rejoins the English vocal harmonisers for a retread of their bestselling *Officium* album on ECM London Barbican, 5 December, 8pm, £27 50-£10, 0171 638 8891

Hood Leeds based, sadcore lo-fi rockers with new album *Rustic Houses, Forlorn Valleys* due for early 98 release Manchester Briton's Protection (5 December), Leeds Royal Standard (6), info on 0171 737 6359

DJ Hurricane The HipHop head from The Beastie Boys' Grand Royal label kicks off the Blue Note's new Tuesday evening live slot London Blue Note, 2 December, 9pm-2am, £6, 0171 729 8440

In Cahoots Progressive jazz from guitarist Phil Miller's Improv quartet, also starring Elton Dean, Jim Dvorak, Fred Baker, Pip Pyle and Peter Lemer They are on tour this month at Hull Dee Street Club (3 December), Leeds Irish Centre (4), Old Harlow St John's Arts Centre (5), Brentwood Hermit Club (6), and London Vortex (8) All info from Jazz Services on 0171 405 0737

Billy Jenkins The kitchen sink situationist whose guitar kills fascists appears live at Bracknell Southill Park Arts Centre (6 December, 8pm, 01344 427272) and Derby Montage Gallery (10, 8pm, 01332 342013)

Femi Kuti & The Positive Force Son of the late Nigerian beatmaster Fela brings his exciting 18 strong group to East London for this all-night session London Stratford Rex, 361-373 High Street, E15, 5 December, 10pm-6am, £10, 0181 215 6003

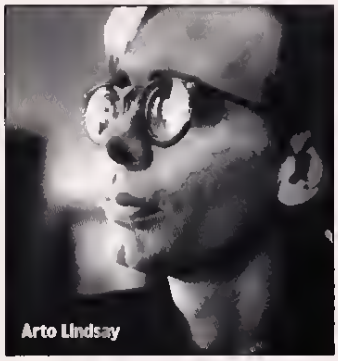
Arto Lindsey Downtown NYC denizen airs his new blend of Latin-tinged pop London Dingwalls, 7 December, £7, 0171 267 1577

µ-Ziq + Jega + Luke Vibert Mike Paradinas beams in from Planet Mu for a breakbeat-enhanced live set, with Skam Records' Jega in tow London Powerhaus, 19 December, 9pm-2am, £8/£7, 0181 961 5490

Michael Nyman Recital of Nyman's selected film music and saxophone works by London Saxophonic, a large brass ensemble who've worked with Moondog and John Harle London Purcell Room, 15 December, 8pm, £10, 0171 960 4242

Courtney Pine Five-night post-Xmas festivities from the freewheeling sax modernist whose jazz outfit is augmented by a troupe of DJs London Jazz Cafe, 27-31 December, 0171 344 0044

Projekt One Almost but not quite King Crimson this blazing free rock quartet



Arto Lindsay

features Robert Fripp, Bill Bruford, Trey Gunn and Tony Levin London Jazz Cafe, 1-4 December, £15-£12.50, 0171 344 0044

Oskar Sala As reported last month, the last surviving exponent of the Trautonium will be giving a presentation about a life's dedication to this amazing electronic instrument. Also taking part will be Autechre and Cristian Vogel London Goethe Institute, 8 December, 7 30pm, free, booking 0171 411 3441

Tortoise + Mouse On Mars + Salaryman + Long Fin Killie Two UK dates as part of 'Wow! & Flutter', City Slang and Too Pure's joint European tour This is the first chance to hear new Tortoise material since 1996's *Millions Now Living* album, plus the turbulent math-rock of Salaryman and (in London only) the excellent live pressure of Germany's Mouse On Mars Scottish surreal popsters Long Fin Killie open up Manchester Hop & Grape (2 December), London Camden Electric Ballroom (3)

Xenakis/Giennie Percussionist Evelyn Glennie premieres a new, untitled work by the 75 year old stochastic composer, The London Sinfonietta also play his *Palimpsest*, *Thallein* and other new French music London QEH, 2 December, 7 45pm, £12 50/£6, 0171 960 4242 Glennie also performs the world premiere of Dave Heath's new chamber piece, *Darkness To Light* (London Barbican, 9, 7 30pm, £15-£6, 0171 638 8891

Club Spaces

Skip McDonald

2:13 Club Gail Brand's Blessed Unprovised Music, featuring the microtonal Spanish guitar of Hugh Metcalfe and Matthew Scott's "below the belt piano", play at this oddly timed regular improv club, and Chris Burn plays Henry Cowell piano works. London Library Gallery, Stoke Newington Church St, N16, 6 December, 2 13pm, £4/£3, 0181 802 5018

The Big Chill Global Communication's Tom Middleton, Cologne Junglists Karma, and Moving Shadow's Hoax float the beats over this Sunday social crowd Plus DJs Pete Lawrence and Phantom Beats London Spitz, 7 December, 6 30pm-midnight, £8/£6, 0171 247 9747

Defunkt Billy Nasty lays down some serious 4/4 beats at Cristian Vogel's monthly Techno jam Visuals by Alchemical Warfare Products and Mat Consume Brighton Escape Club, 11 December, £4/£3, 01273 707461

Electronicage Spaceheads (Andy Diagram and Richard Harrison) and Stock, Hausen & Walkman play live tunes spun by DJ Vadim, and Dark Ambient electronics from Modulus London Spitz, 17 December, 8pm, £6/£4, 0171 247 9747

Electronic Lounge Tuning in to the state of contemporary electronic music in the company of Santa Scanner London ICA, 2 December, 9pm-1am, £2 50/£2, 0171 498 3032

ESP New weekly beat-kedgeree served up by former Rumpus Room DJ Robin Lo London Koha Bar, 11 St Martin's Court, WC1, Saturdays, 7-11pm, free, info 0171 267 4317

Fear Of A Crap Planet Strange sonics at this Sussex venue, with a solo, intimate set from Jimi Tenor and DJing by Russell Haswell, Mark Broom and Touch's Jez Potter Brighton Underground Club, West Street, 4 December, 10pm-2am, £5/£3, 01273 327701

Game Over Roll up for Ninja Tune's pre-Christmas celebration and check the amazing turntable skills of Canada's Kid Koala Also in attendance the usual stellar/stealthy line up of Coldcut/Hex, DJ Food, Si Begg, Richard Thair (Red Snapper), Chantal, Mixmaster Morris, DJ Vadim, The Herbaliser and more, plus visuals by Hexstatic and Light Surgeons London 333 Club, 333 Old Street, EC1, 4 December, 9pm-4am, 0171 739 5949

Metalheadz Goldie's regular Sunday Sessions. dark breakbeats at bone-crushing volume from the likes of Fabio, Grooverider, Kemistry & Storm, Doc Scott and Randall London Blue Note, Sundays, 7pm-midnight, £8/£4, 0171 729 8440

PM Scientists Two rooms of deepest drum 'n' bass Guests this month Bailey and Atlas Records DJs (3 December), Swift and Transfusion (10), Ed Rush and Andrea Parker (17) London Smithfields, 340 Farringdon Street, EC1, Wednesdays, 10pm-2 30am, £5/£4, 0171 236 8112

Prescription Presiding over the final appointment at this night of radical musical surgery are T Power, Jimpster and Kiss 102's Matt Thompson Manchester Phoenix, Oxford Road, 6 December, free, 0161 273 3753

The Sprawl Amon Tobin (aka Cujo) takes to the decks alongside Plaid spin-off Kushti and Lo Recordings' Richard Thomas Residents Si-{cut}db and Bit Tonic plug the gaps London Global Cafe, 15 Golden Square, W1, 11 December, 7 30pm-midnight, £3 50/£3, 0171 700 7569

Steppas Randall, Ed Rush and Optical guest at this neurofunking night. London Imperial Gardens, 299 Camberwell New Rd, SE5, 20 December, 10pm-6am, £7 50/£5, 0171 252 6000

Swaraj With Anokha currently offline until the new year, the Monday slot is filled by this new eclectic global night Residents Nasha Experience and Pathaan supply the breakbeat/tabla/ghazal ambience, guests will include Ritu, Dhol Foundation, Earthtribe and more London Blue Note, Mondays, 10pm-3am, £5/£3, 0171 729 8440

Swerve New weekly replacement for the influential Speed club, run by Jungle don Fabio to showcase the output of his Creative Source label London Velvet Underground, Wednesdays, 10pm-2 30am £6/£4, 0171 439 4655

T Bones Dub maestros Little Axe (Keith Leblanc, Skip McDonald and Adrian Sherwood) lay down some deep riddim, Fun-Da-Mental's Impi D and Overhaul whip up the emotional heat, and DJs Ritu, Nathan Haines and A-Sides are joined by live drums and tablas at this East London Xmas special London 333 Club, 333 Old Street, EC1, 18 December, 10pm-4am, £5, 0171 253 4060

Technique Successful Derby DJ night, this month featuring Nicky Blackmarket (4 December), Tony Global, Sparra and Ratty (11), and a Christmas special with Grooverider, DJ S, Nutonik and more (18) Derby Loft, 110 Friargate, Thursdays, 9 30pm-2am, £3 50/£3, 01332 381169

The Wireless Underground sounds from breakbeat to big beat to downbeat to no beat London Koha Bar, WC2, Fridays, 7-11pm, free, 0171 420 5626

Radio

National

BBC Radio 1

Andy Kershaw *Mondays 8:40-10 30pm* World Music from all quarters, folk, roots reggae and more
John Peel *Tuesdays-Thursdays 8 40-10 30pm* The best place to keep up with new rock, indie, Techno, Jungle Electronica, dub and the legendary sessions
One In The Jungle *Fridays 10pm-midnight* Guest DJs provide hour-long breakbeat mix
Annie Nightingale *Sundays 4-6am* Chilled eclectic sounds for the après clubber

BBC Radio 3

Mixing N *Mondays 10.45-11 30pm* Eclectic rattlebag of new sounds hosted by Robert Sandall and Mark Russell This month Furt (Richard Barrett & Paul Obermayer) recorded at the LMC's Zwischenspiel concerts (8 December) special Coldcut feature (22)
Hear And Now *Fridays 10-12pm* Contemporary music magazine interviews, record reviews sessions. This month portrait of American composer Lou Harrison (5 December), new pieces by Pascal Dusapin (12) Thomas Adès's *Piano Concerto* (19), tribute to Alexander Goehr (26)
Impressions *Alternate Saturdays 10:45pm-1am* Modern jazzers in session. This month Wolfgang Puschnig live at the London Jazz Festival (13 December)

Regional

BBC Derby

Soundscapes *Sundays 3-5pm* Ashley Franklin plays instrumental Electronica, contemporary classical/systems music New Age and Ambient

BBC Greater London Radio (GLR)

Ross Allen *Wednesdays 8-10.30pm* TripHipo Techno, Electro Big Beats and drum n' bass
Charlie Gillett *Saturdays 7-9pm* Rock, roots, dub, World Music, blues R&B and more

BBC Lancashire

On The Wire *Saturdays 12-2am* Steve Barker's seasoned New Music mix dub experimental electronics out rock free Improv and more

BBC Merseyside

The Late World Noise *Sundays midnight-2am* Out rock, psychedelia, Jungle, avant dance, warped Ambient and global gems in themed sequences (note new day/time)

CRMK (Milton Keynes)

The Garden Of Earthly Delights *Fridays 10pm-1am* Shane Quentin's blend of avant rock to electronic exotica with bizarre soundbites

Kiss 100 FM (London)

Ruff Cuts *Wednesdays 7-9pm* Latest drum 'n bass spun by Kenny Ken and DJ Hype
Givin' It Up *Wednesdays 2-4am* Specially recorded sessions and in-studio appearances
Intelligent Drum 'N' Bass *Fridays 12-2am* Fabio and Grooverider rinse out the jams
Solid Steel *Saturdays 1-3am* Multi-deck mayhem from Coldcut and the Ninja crew
The Chill Out Zone *Sundays 6-7am* Paul Thomas's experimental Ambient, dub and Electronica mix
Innervisions *Sundays 8pm-midnight* Eclectic jazz-not-jazz plus Nu and Old School electronic innovations from Patrick Forge and Gilles Peterson

Kiss 102 FM (Manchester)

Matt Thompson *Weekdays 10pm-2am* Fresh late night soundtrack in a mixed-up, jumpcut style
Da Intalex Drum 'N' Bass Show *Mondays 8-10pm* Tuff Jungle with XTC and Marcus
808 State *Fridays midnight-1am* Something for the weekend from the veteran crew
Alpha Waves *Saturdays 4-6am* Environments, exotica and isolationism with Stuart James

XFM (London)

John Kennedy *Monday-Thursday 11pm-2 3-am/Sundays 10pm-1am* Former RTM presenter spins noise post-rock dub Electronica, experimental Ambient
Caspar Kedros *Saturdays 10pm-1am* New leftfield dance, Techno and HipHop tracks

Soundings items for the January issue should reach us by ***Friday 5 December***

letters

Write to: Letters, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, or fax. 0171 287 4767, or e-mail: *the_wire@ukonline co.uk* Please include a full name and address. Every letter published wins a FREE CD

O'Rourke's drift

And so yet another of my silent prayers has been heard with the incredibly elaborate Jim O'Rourke story (*The Wire* 165). I do feel, though, that there is a paradox in all this. his reluctance towards fame versus his admirers all over the world (many of them musicians themselves no doubt, people struggling to be able to play their thing without ever seriously hoping to make any money at all). And people do struggle, even the best. So what's wrong with being famous among peers, with being asked to contribute to things you can afford to refuse, with earning good money doing the stuff you like doing? Don't get me wrong. I admire the man for turning down an offer from the fashionable Kronos Quartet and for his attitude towards people who think 'leftovers' are good enough for a compilation as long as there's the O'Rourke name on it. His musical integrity is beyond discussion. But what *does* 'isolationism' mean? I hope it's not arrogance and self-importance clad in veils of idiosyncrasy and stage fright.

By the way, *Crookt, Crackt Or Fly* was not the first Gastr Del Sol album. *The Serpentine Similar* was released on Teenbeat in 1993 and reissued last year on Dexter's Cigar. However, *Crookt* was the first album featuring O'Rourke.

Sybilla Poortman *An Holtum, Netherlands*

Balanced reporting 1

Re: the lack of coverage of women artists in *The Wire* (Letters, *The Wire* 164). Just as (if not more) important is the under-representation of women among your writers, the small number of women in your list of contributors bears this out. To draw attention to this isn't some kind of kneejerk 'political correctness', but rather a feeling that this creates an unhealthily skewed overall outlook. *The Wire* prides itself, justifiably, on the range of musics it covers, and the depth in which it covers them, but the range of ways of listening to, responding and writing about these musics is possibly being curtailed by your lack of female contributors.

Without descending into fatuous stereotyping, there is something to be said for the idea that women respond to music in different ways to men (less of the collector/trainspotter/anorak approach). Also, perhaps more importantly, women tend to take a less oppositional/competitive approach, and may therefore avoid the tendency of some male writers of being unable to praise one artist/type of music without simultaneously rubbishing another. (I'm thinking mainly of the mainstream pop press here, but there are examples in *The Wire*, eg Ben Watson's double review of Hancock/Shorter and Braxton/Graewe, and David Keenan's rather pointless comparison of UK and US free improv scenes.)

These are clearly sweeping generalisations, and women are obviously just as capable of writing drivel as men, but I do seriously think that this gender imbalance is preventing you from being even more open-eared and wide-ranging than you are at present.

Geoff Symes *London*

Balanced reporting 2

I would like to tell you that I really enjoy Louise Gray's insightful, well researched and articulate articles and reviews. Her writing stands fresh alongside (or above) what can at times feel like a musical equivalent of *Hot Rod* magazine. Please continue to give her ample work. Having said that.

The reason there are more featured male musicians and contributors to *The Wire* is not necessarily due to boys trying to keep girls out of the clubhouse, as some readers would assert. Rather, I would like to suggest that this is a simple reflection of a natural imbalance in the music business and in music interests in general.

For almost a decade I worked in a record store that catered for the musically adventurous, and for some inexplicable reason, the vast majority of our regular customers were male. This is a university town where the female to male ratio is two to one. Even at big city record conventions, it is very noticeably a male dominated crowd. Further, I have countless male friends who would rather listen to their new CD purchases over any kind of social activity; like-minded female friends I could count on one hand. And I would be willing to wager (and I'm not a gambling man) that the readership of this magazine has a similar gender imbalance.

I would think it quite sensible then, in reference to Siobhan Kearney's letter (*The Wire* 164), to expect to see *The Wire* T-shirt adorning the female form. Let's be reasonable: even in the 90s, sex still sells, and this magazine is, after all, a commercial enterprise. The comment that the T-shirt model was chosen for "the fact that she has tits" was a reactionary cheap shot and one I almost kick myself for commenting on. The ad is *not* in poor taste. It does, however, appeal to our senses. Not such a crime, I would think, considering that one of the main reasons for reading this magazine is to inform and feed our senses.

R Visentin *Miho, Japan*

Assez d'histoire

C'est assez, man! I mean, sure, Rahma Khazam does us all a favour by offering a corrective to the Anglo-Aryan fixation of the post-rock/Electronica microverse (*The Wire* 165), but that's no excuse for getting the French rock scene of earlier decades so dreadfully and cartoonishly wrong. Not only has French popular music "lagged behind" Germany's and the UK's, says Khazam, but French rock has "steadfastly eschewed all forms of experimentalism". Not so the first point, dead silly the second. The only two 70s out rock bands mentioned are Heldon (an electronic rock band who, contrary to Khazam's classification, have zero to do with Rock In Opposition) and Magma. Khazam is mistaken when he *[she, actually — Ed]* suggests that Christian Vander's vision "remained tethered in his own private universe", and that French rock was out of touch with developments elsewhere in the world. In fact, Magma sparked an international avant-Prog style known as Zeuhl, with dozens of adherents in France (Potemkine, Eskaton, and Shub Niggurath among them) and a profound impact upon bands as far afield as Sweden (Kultivator, Zamla Mammaz Manna), Argentina (Bubu, Mia) and Japan (well before Ruins and Koenji there was JA Caesar).

Besides Zeuhl, RIO also flourished in France, led by such bands as Etron Fou, ZNR, and Art Zoyd. A large number of other French artists worked in the RIO vein, including Art Moulu and Albert Marcoeur. There can be no question that this most 'experimental' of rock forms had (and has) more practitioners and influence here than in any other country.

But the glory of French rock doesn't end there. Any lover of demented Krautrock grown tired of picking up reissues of Kraut 'classics' that turn out to be half-baked hard rock records had better start buying French instead: from Red Noise and Fille Qui Mousse to Komintern, Ame Son, Archaia and well beyond, truly fucking weird, stupefyingly fantastic Franco-Prog awaits. And if, like me and unlike too many uptight post-rockistas, you're also interested in exploring the more euphonious and even 'symphonic' varieties of Progressive rock, the drop-dead gorgeous dream narratives of Pulsar, Ange and Atoll beckon. Of course there are many others, but the point by now is made: the French 70s were at least as vital as anybody else's, so let's put the cliches to rest. France rocks, d'accord?

Matthew Martens *New York, USA*

Corrections *Issue 165*: In Print Run, the retail price of Stride Research's Sun Ra book, *Another Shade Of Blue*, should have been listed as £2.50, not £3.50. In Soundcheck, the title of the Robert Ashley album reviewed on page 54 is *Atalanta*, not *Atlanta*, the *Unique Horn* album reviewed on page 72 should have been credited to Martin Mayes, not Malcolm Hayes, the contact for the Comatonse label, which has no connection with Cargo Distribution, as was listed, should have been Comatonse, 1097 54th Street, Oakland, CA 94608, USA. E-mail: *info@comatonse.com*. The review of The Maciunas Ensemble album, as listed in the Soundcheck index, went AWOL at the last minute. It now appears in this month's Soundcheck. □

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Cyro Baptista

Rhythm methods

Punctuating his richly accented speech with martial growls, manic cries and fanfares of thunderous laughter, Cyro Baptista orbits his living room, bouncing from couch to floor to stray drum, discussing percussion with the same hyper-animation he radiates in performance. "No matter what instrument you use, a matchbox, a bassoon, or some super drum machine, when I'm playing with you, I want you to tell me a story," he says. "That's what life is, that's what I want out of music." His musical associations, with artists including John Zorn, Paul Simon, Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno, Kathleen Battle, Keiji Haino, Cassandra Wilson, Derek Bailey and Nana Vasconcelos, constitute a remarkable litany of diverse personalities and contexts. Cyro's startling virtuosity is just part of the reason why he is one of the most in-demand percussionists in contemporary music. More vital to his aesthetic is an utter faith in his musical roots, coupled with a disarming sense of humour that charges his work with an automatic empathy.

You can hear those qualities at work on *Vira Loucos: Cyro Baptista Plays The Music Of Villa Lobos*, which was recently released on John Zorn's Avant label. The record interprets a number of themes by the towering early 20th century Brazilian composer Heitor Villa Lobos. It is a deep, dense, clanging mosaic of rhythm, with songs unfurling in an almost psychedelic timbral parade. The idea for the record, which features input from Nana Vasconcelos, Marc Ribot and Greg Cohen, emerged during workshops which Cyro gave for The New World Symphony Orchestra in 1996. But his connection with Villa Lobos goes back much further.

Born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Cyro came of age in a musical climate still haunted by the spectre of the great composer-pedagogue. "He had this programme for his choros, where one school would learn one part of a tune, another school would learn another part, and so on," he explains. "Then they would get together in the soccer stadium in Brazil, and he would conduct all the parts." Cyro's formative educational experiences, however, were marked by a turning away from the master's influence: "Villa Lobos's programme probably worked well in his era, but by the time I was in school it seemed kind of boring. I had an amazing teacher who was very smart. Instead of forcing us to learn that stuff, she organised a percussion group to explore Brazilian rhythms, and from there I went on to making my own instruments and playing in the band." At the same time, Cyro began tuning into the cosmic transmissions which Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis were beaming down from the States, as well as the homegrown explorations of musicians such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. "My time in Brazil was like my formation," he says, "but coming to America was like graduation."

Even if its rewards are well-deserved, Cyro's career has been a charmed constellation of right-place/right time scenarios, beginning in 1980 with an exchange programme that landed him at the pre-Reaganomic oasis that was the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, New York. The Studio's instructors included Don Cherry, Trilok Gurtu and his future mentor Nana Vasconcelos, and Cyro was thrust into an interstellar artistic overdrive unlike anything he had experienced in Brazil. But inevitably, New York City beckoned. "I came to pass a weekend, and I've been here 17 years," he says.

From humble beginnings performing in the only spaces open to him — the city's public parks and squares — Cyro formed a percussion group with fellow Brazilian expats. The group was eventually booked for a regular engagement at the immortally hip Mudd Club, whose owner rented them a spacious Lower East Side loft. These new circumstances deposited Cyro in the centre of one of the world's most notoriously fecund artistic communities. "The Lower East Side was really important for me, it felt like a family there," he recalls. "We ran a samba school out of this building we took from the city. We staged huge parades with costumes and floats that would stop traffic all the way up to 70th Street." A photo from one of these events shows a young Arto Lindsay helping with the proceedings.

In fact, it was witnessing Lindsay's seminal skullfuckery in DNA that blew a few cerebral fuses for Cyro, irrevocably piquing his fascination with the wilder fringes of contemporary music. He was hired to play in some of John Zorn's earliest 'game' pieces, and their association has continued up to Cyro's current involvement in the 'chamber' version of Zorn's Masada group. Their longest running and most prolific collaboration, however, has been on Zorn's ever-growing body of film scores. "I have this little machine that cranks out soundtracks," says Zorn, referring to his close-knit cadre of *Filmworks* players. "Cyro is a total blast in the studio and he can do anything. I really miss him when he's not on a session." Which is rare: whether Zorn is scoring obscure S&M flicks, or spots for avant garde ad agency Weiden and Kennedy, Cyro routinely provides the tumbling rhythms that ground the fractured, spaghetti-*noir* symphonettes that have become Zorn's film music trademark. "We can go into a studio at noon and by 7pm we've recorded and mixed 40 cues," says Cyro, "Zorn wants us to get in front of a mic and really take chances. He creates a very emotional environment in there, most musicians would just leave the session, but we're there because we love him. We have a telepathic communication."

If John Zorn represents one pole in Cyro's mentor-axis, then his percussionist countryman Nana Vasconcelos is the other. Their *Rainbance* album is a pinnacle of post-Olatunji percussion pyrotechnics. "In many ways I really owe my career to him, he's the big influence on my playing, and even more so on my professional conduct, how to work in this business," says Cyro of Vasconcelos. "He taught me how to use the organic elements of my playing in different situations, like how to come off sounding natural through a microphone, or if the situation calls for it, how to sound more industrial or machine-like. But more than anything, he's just been a great friend. We cook together. We're compadres."

I play Cyro a bootleg cassette of his recent performance with Keiji Haino. He is amused to recognise his own voice, soaring in tandem with Haino's, totally unintimidated by Tokyo's beshaded shaman of improvised aggression. "I always believe in my roots. I can't get out of what I learned from the music of my country, that's my foundation," he says. "I go out and try to be myself, go back to my basics, and from there, if someone wants to go a little bananas, then I go out there with them." He pauses. "The percussion universe is just so *vast*." **AC LEE** *Vira Loucos is out now on Avant (through Harmonia Mundi).*

PHOTO: LEONORA BAPTISTA

Company Flow

Funcrushing HipHop

"MCs are artists. Rappers are businessmen. They're just entertainers." So says Mr Len, DJ with the New York HipHop crew Company Flow. The statement immediately sets out the group's agenda: to distance themselves from the venal excesses of the corporate rap industry, and reconnect with HipHop's origins as a local, independent, grass roots phenomenon.

Company Flow are definitely not entertainers. The first crew to fully pick up on Eric B & Rakim's mantle of scientific HipHop, the trio of Mr Len, producer and MC El-P and MC Bigg Jus make HipHop for die-hards, the hardcore heads who groove to the sound of "mutants who can twist space around them". While their outlook is strictly for those "who live the life", their music deserves to be heard outside the boundaries of HipHop's occasionally self-enforced ghetto.

"We grew up on Schooly D, Run DMC, Audio Two, EPMD, Rakim, BDP," says El-P. "These were our influences, the hard-ass kicks and snares and the raw elements of the production. We definitely try to recreate that feeling, that emotion of rawness, and still do it in a progressive way."

Company Flow surround their rhymes and beats with stale, musty atmospheres that are punctuated by shards of Metal and some of the dirtiest scratching heard since early Schooly D. "8 Steps To Perfection", from their recent debut album *Funcrusher Plus*, is typical of their approach to sound: a smooth 70s soul string part straight out of Dr Dre's repertoire gets dissolved and acid-washed into an attenuated blur. Even the record's DJ tracks, which serve as fillers on most rap albums, are so disjointed that they feel like the nightmares in *The Manchurian Candidate*. In Company Flow's hands HipHop's traditional funk bounce become de-funked, funcrushed. "We take sounds and manipulate them," says El-P. "When we make a track it's usually a process of mistakes, and the mistakes that stick are the song. We know what we're doing, it's just that with our music we have a slightly spiritual, kind of weird thing that happens. We'll be attempting to go one place and it'll go to a completely different place, and that'll be the place it needed to go."

Company Flow connect with all aspects of HipHop culture (one track on *Funcrusher Plus* features a litany of graffiti tags). In November they played live in Brighton, and thanks to the turntable skills of Mr Len, pulled off one of the best HipHop shows since the glory days of BDP. A DJ who once got Carpal Tunnel Syndrome from practising too much, Len's style lies somewhere between the battle scars of The X-Men and the switchblade slashes of DJ Code Money. "Most of the DJ battles that I've been in were like the basement house party battles where even if you win, you lose. 'You did good, so we're gonna fuck you up'," he says, laughing.

On *Funcrusher Plus*, Company Flow's emotional palette extends way beyond the kind of self-aggrandising typical of most HipHop MCs. The stunning "Last Good Sleep" is that rarest of things, a rap track that not only confronts misogyny, but also admits to weakness and failure. Bigg Jus pierces vital nerves with the brutal funk, while El-P is the *"Triple felon MC minus the melanin/When I bomb I talk with the shit to make Baby Jessica jump back in the well again."*

"I read a lot," says El-P. "Phillip K Dick, George Orwell, William Gibson. I'm not just taking some random sci-fi word and leaving it in the context of that word. I am still relating it to shit. I think about the future a lot, and I think that the inadequacies of life translate really well in science fiction because it's just like the extremes of what's going to happen. Technology seems to be the bugged out result of the insanity of people, so that kind of impresses me."

Even with all the science on display, Company Flow don't neglect the groove. They have enough sense to quote professional wrestlers and specialise in the one-line mini-epiphanies that are HipHop's raison d'etre. *"My shit is like* War And Peace, *yours is just the Cliff Notes"*, *"Fuckin' with your theology like Darwinism in the Bible Belt"*. "It's about battling bullshit with life," says El-P about their lyrics. "With *Funcrusher*, we're stamping the end of an era where motherfuckers think they could get over on some bullshit. It's raising the stakes. You're doing that, we're doing this. You gotta hit the books pretty much. It's an arrogant thing." **PETER SHAPIRO**

Funcrusher Plus *is out now on Rawkus (through Cargo)*

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Brief history I've run a label for my own music since 1985, when I came to realise that it would be unrealistic and unfair to expect anyone else to do a better job of it than I was able to do myself

Statement of intent I'm committed to using every shred of knowledge I've gained over 25 years of composing, improvising, failing, succeeding, fiddling and exploring to play my part in taking music to the next phase. I believe that each release should be a definitive statement rather than a snapshot of a work in progress or a document of live work. With my own stuff I believe that combining state of the art sound (thanks to producer Charlie Collins) with creative use of new music technology and real playing from real improvisors is the basis for a life's work

Other activities Nothing matters except music

Future plans *Pure Water Construction*, a joint composition with Simon H Fell, which will orchestrate improvisations by John Russell, Chris Burn, Stefan Jaworzyn and others with a virtual chamber ensemble. *Winter Pilgrim Arriving*, a solo record which will probably take a year or so. The Ask CD *Disconnected Bliss*, which is unbelievably heavy, is about to be released. Vaguely planning *Network Vol Three*. Send me your 90 second contributions on cassette now!

Choice cut Transient v Resident — *Electrical Shroud*, Various — *Network Vol One*

(Info & manifesto: Martin Archer)

Richard Thomas

Welsh assembler

"Can you turn it off?" Not for the first time this interview, Richard Thomas seems afraid my Walkman is going to steal his soul. But then, he is unduly sensitive to the divining powers of magnetic tape. He's telling me to hit the pause button while he catalogues a few personal woes, some of which flare up like an aching tooth in the wonderfully crusty, one-off tape pieces that are included on his debut album, *Shoes And Radios Attract Paint*. It's a peculiarly apposite title. Thomas keeps himself earthed via an insouciant demystification of his own work, but is happy to describe his role in the music as similar to an antenna. "I don't feel like there's any mystical genius to it," he says, "but I do feel like you have to be an open channel sometimes, it's a matter of sort of tuning yourself in."

Microelectronics, digital compression and modern studio limiting dampen down the raw wildness of electricity. Thomas uses physical, vibrant sound — horns, xylophone, squeaky toys, static — recalling an era when guitars had names like Broadcaster, Telecaster, Stratocaster: threats to the stillness of the air and the body's cushioning flesh. He's not afraid of music that hurts. "Ultrasounds which are really tiny, but affect the eadrum pressure." Referring to "Waxy Flexibility (Part Three)", the album's coda, he remembers: "I felt like I had a stroke when I did it, like the cerebral hemispheres were fucked, I don't know."

Thomas's sprawling channelling sessions take place after hours in the recording studio where he holds down his day-job in Newport, South Wales. Inspired by the DIY ethics of production mavencks such as Joe Meek, King Tubby and the concrete exploits of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, his music feels like a hypersensitised, electromagnetic catchment area designed to soak up whatever he throws into it. Glowing nebulae of static give birth to stellar improvised trumpet bellows, reverb-drenched cymbals, and hubbub from an extended family of analogue synths. You can imagine microphones arranged in a shamanic circle as Richard dances in the middle, deep in the night, triggering looped interference patterns and nurturing his strange hologrammatic stereo images.

Ancestral ghosts and closet skeletons become trapped in this "car boot sale-esque" phantasmagoria. "Sometimes I look back and think a lot of it was to do with my grandfather being a musician," he says. "He died before I was born. He had a primitive two-track reel-to-reel — I used to be fascinated by this stuff. He used to make violins, so you'd find half a violin lying about. I use a lot of his instruments as well: clarinet and things like that. My gran's got a blitz-damaged piano, really out of tune, and I used to fiddle around with all this stuff. It opened up my ears so that when I heard music that utilised dissonance, it didn't strike me as being that odd."

Thomas has recently learnt that his *great*-grandfather, returning shellshocked from the trenches of the First World War, painted his house blue and started building wireless sets. "He was quite an eccentric man: this was semi-industrial Wales in the 1930s." The opening track on *Shoes And Radios*, "The Horla/Occupying The Distance Shredder", was inspired by one of 19th century French decadent Guy de Maupassant's short stories. "He's haunted by this entity, the Horla. It's never made clear whether he's having a schizophrenic episode or whether this thing actually exists, but he's talking about how recording things preserves ghosts. I'm not into spooky stuff, but he talks about stuff that's occurring in the 19th century like hypnotism — and about 1903 Freud published his book about dream analysis, so it was close to that, and phonograph records. On that track, a lot of the loops you're hearing, bits of conversation have been really chopped up, and it's generally the voices and sounds of people who are close to me. Music should be a fantastical experience — I don't mean in an Aleister Crowley way, but it should be beyond our ordinary experience of life."

In the late 80s Thomas played in a group called Guinea Worm, when Newport was something of a regional centre for hardcore thrash Metal. A few of his solo tracks appeared in 1992 on a local compilation, but it was only while studying in London that the Leaf label commissioned him to contribute four incidental pieces to its *Invisible Soundtracks* EPs. He prefers to call his music "audio documentary", tiered with associations, memories, insinuations. "I'm really influenced by weather," he says. ""Valley Of The Interlocking Spurs" is [about] lying in someone's garden in summertime: you can hear a radio [on one side] and someone cutting the grass [on the other] — the spatialisation of sound is really weird there. My girlfriend found out in a geography lesson that the valley they were living in was actually a valley of interlocking spurs. Also, she broke a watch — all the springs popped out, and when I did the tune, it reminded me of that. There are little things attached to it that I find hard to shake off." He also tells me he's been using a toy watch with a built-in sampler to record dialogue and other real-life excerpts. "I do things with an open heart," he explains, "it's got that intimacy — it's quite a personal thing. I'm a bit wary of talking about some of it, because one person who I have a lot of difficulties with is on that album. Do you want to turn it off, and I'll tell you why."

ROB YOUNG

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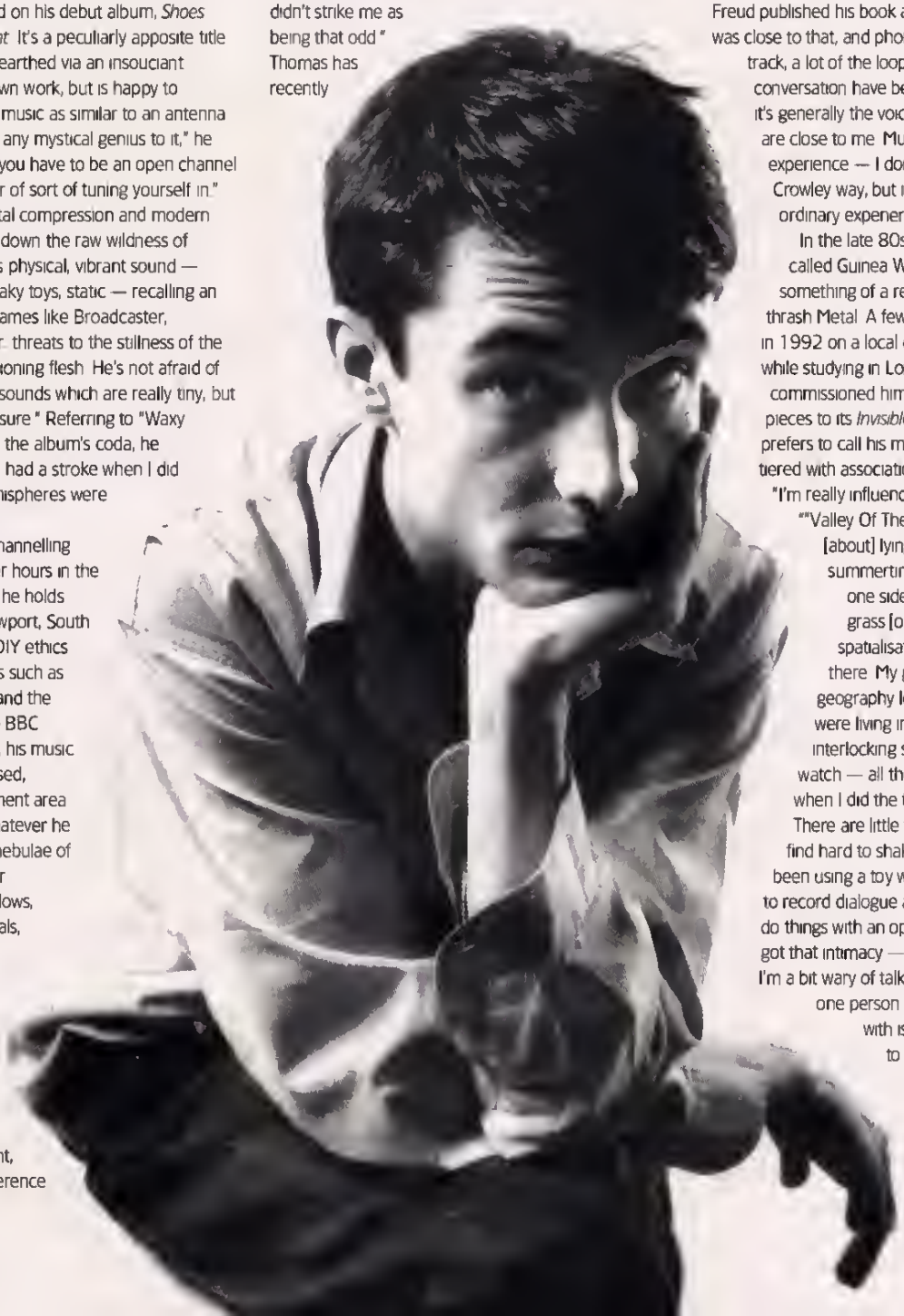

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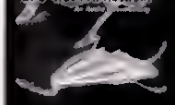

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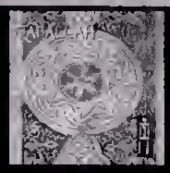

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Tim Berne

Screwgun slinger

Saxophonist Tim Berne describes record production as "kind of like giving birth". Each release usually involves a partnership, the subsequent dissolution of which can leave mixed feelings, and Berne prefers not to dwell on the closure of Stephan Winter's German JMT label, for whom he recorded for most of the last decade. "There just aren't too many people who have the staying power to stay in the business and remain true to their principles," he says. As a result, and despite the fact that he has recently released an album, *Big Satan*, on Winter's post-JMT imprint Winter & Winter, Berne is keen to concentrate on Screwgun, his new label. "I really had to change my approach, do things on a shoestring," he says enthusiastically. "Everything had to be done more guerrilla style."

Despite the fact that Berne describes the running of Screwgun as "a little stressful", he has been here before: his debut album, *The Five Year Plan*, was released on his own, now defunct Empire label way back in 1979. Berne's foremost current project, with bassist Mike Formanek, drummer Jim Black and reed player Chris Speed, is Bloodcount. Two triple CD Bloodcount sets are already in the shops, a new disc is available by mail order, and a further release is scheduled for next February. Berne says he'd "sort of played out" his interest in the kind of heavily arranged electric chamber-jazz which characterised his JMT records, and

"just wanted to be in a band of my own where I didn't know what was going to happen. It's really exciting and it's sort of terrifying, too, but I just know that this band is going to be together a long time, and that's a nice feeling."

The Screwgun ethic is pure DIY: the CDs come wrapped in monochrome cardboard covers courtesy of artist Steve Byram, and most of the Bloodcount sessions were recorded live using just a single microphone. "We get such a sound on stage that I'd almost rather do it this way," says Berne. "None of the recordings were done with the intention of making a record. When I decided to start the label I started going through tapes finding the best music. I really wanted it to be stripped down, a little more in-your-face than the other ones."

Berne's other current group is Paraphrase, a trio which explores raw improvisation. He says that "there was a point where I was almost afraid to record, because the reason I formed the band was that I was uncomfortable doing this", but it's a sentiment belied by the authority of his playing on the trio's new *Visitation Rites* album. Berne is best known as an alto saxophonist, but on *Visitation Rites* he mostly plays baritone sax. The instrument-switch reflects his desire to harness the kind of deep sonorities available to players of low-register string instruments, as well as the ongoing influence of his early mentor, saxophonist Julius Hemphill (Berne's 1992 JMT album *Diminutive Mysteries* was conceived as a homage to Hemphill). "Julius had a cello for a long time, and I always loved the instrument. I heard it in a lot of different settings, not just classical, and it's a beautiful sound. Even on the alto I try to use the string instruments as a model for tones, more so than other saxophones — it's a pretty expressive instrument." This enthusiasm is further reflected by a recent commission by The Kronos Quartet, and by a performance in Cologne with a large group which included violin, cello, bass and acoustic guitar. Further plans include bringing a 12-piece group to the UK in March, reforming the Cologne ensemble in the studio, recording with Ducret on acoustic instruments, collating a box set of live recordings, and perhaps a return to something "really heavily arranged, with shorter pieces, just for the hell of it really". Tim Berne obviously knows how to make a little economic viability go a long way. **TIM OWEN**

Screwgun releases are distributed through New Note/Pinnacle, or available direct from The Screwgun Building, 104 St Marks Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, NY 11217, USA. Big Satan is out now on Winter & Winter (through Harmonia Mundi)

PHOTOS: NIK STRANGELOVE

freefall

Talk about an Oporto-nity too good to miss! Would I like a trip to the sun-snogged beaches of Dos Palmas Extravagantes, just outside that charming capital of Portugal, Lisbon? You bet your bottom escudo I would. And of course a chance to talk with the Trio Terminale, three of the nicest musicians I've ever met. Anywhere. Except that they don't speak English. So while I'm waiting for my interpreter to show up, let me remind you about Trio Terminale.

They haven't been playing with Elton John or Ry Cooder. Paul Simon isn't about to drop by. They're not even working with Bjork, and Kate Bush never called. But they've got a big hit with a tune off an airline ad, so they're playing London next month.

God knows what they're singing about but it's kind of catchy. And what nice guys! One of them is wearing white trousers, but he still looks cool. And one of them plays the mbira. Do you also play the mbira? I ask. Ah, at last the interpreter.

It's just great shooting the breeze with these guys, but I've got to get back to the airport soon, so I get straight down to the Q&A. But apparently they have some questions they want to ask me. This could get out of hand!

First they want a go on my laptop, and how much did it cost? Then it's: did the newspaper really pay my flight out here, just to talk to them? And how much will I get paid for writing the piece? About a grand, I say. "In my village, that is one year's wage," says Carlos. "Unless you are a ponce."

"Si, si," agrees Manuel. "When I was a ponce I made that money easy in one month. But sir, excuse me for asking: why don't you write a single word about our music? And why does your article namedrop a pop star every 200 words?"

Come on guys, I say, help me out. Give me some cliche or stereotype hook that I can hang your outfit on.

Manuel rolls his eyes, eager to help. "My father died in jail last week. When I was ten years old he went to the neighbouring village and killed every pig for a vendetta."

Manuel, I'm sorry, but this is basically a pop music column I'm writing, and my editor won't... I mean I'm sorry your father died, but it's not going to spice up my copy. Manuel narrows his eyes to meaningful slits. "You don't need spice, my friend, you need chocolate. You see this cappuccino?" He blows hard. Froth all over my bleeding laptop. "Your writing is like a West Ham fan, you are forever blowing bubbles."

That's it! Thanks Manuel, I've got it! So you guys are football fans. **CLIVE BELL**

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daft punk

From the extreme noise terror of breakbeat brats Atari Teenage Riot to his solo Electronica on Europe's brainiac label Mille Plateaux, **Alec Empire** covers all points of the digital diaspora. Words: Biba Kopf. Photography: Dean Belcher

Draped in black from head to foot, Alec Empire looks like an Action Man doll dressed for another undercover night time sortie behind enemy lines. The impression is confirmed by his portraits, which make immediate eye contact with the viewer, as if, even in still-life, he's out to stare you down. To be sure, he cuts an intimidating figure, and that impression is borne out in his role as the motivating fury of Atari Teenage Riot, the punishing Berlin Technopunk terror trio whose do-or-die! ferocity has helped extend Alec's empire to the farthest reaches of the digital diaspora. But in person he cannot hold the squarejawed grimace of his self-image for long before his face dissolves into a grin, and the same pent-up passions that drive ATR's killing frenzies find their release in infectious laughter.

The look that recomposes itself once the laughter subsides reveals the more thoughtful side of a complex character that finds expression in the recently released triple CD box set of solo recordings called, fittingly enough, *The Gerst Of Alec Empire*. Covering the last five years, the discs chart a restless spirit enthusing over fresh developments in Electronica — post-Techno, early Jungle, drum 'n' bass, digital dub — even as he customises them and thereby advances the music in different directions. On the face of it, the spirit captured in the box, compiled from the five albums he released on arguably Europe's most intellectually rigorous label Mille Plateaux, is so utterly different to the magnum force firing ATR, it would be all too easy to diagnose Empire as a schizoid personality.

"Some people," Alec Empire remarks, stifling a Peter Lorre-like giggle, "if they are screamed at all the time, they just close their ears. Atari Teenage Riot can grab the attention by making the noise, and I think most of the people understand straight away what it is all about. I mean, the lyrics are very direct, they are so obvious, you

can't misinterpret what we are doing. But with the Mille Plateaux records I felt that I was getting to people that Atari Teenage Riot wouldn't reach.

Between confrontation and contemplation, Alec's empire is built on seeming contradictions that resolve themselves in the twin-pronged strategic thinking that secured it. Difficulties only arise when it comes into contact with a heavily demarcated outside world that demands that its artists should be one thing or the other. "I think Atari Teenage Riot and my solo stuff are on the same level interesting," challenges Empire. "But people really had a problem with me doing ATR because it was like a completely different thing. They just don't understand it if you go from the solo stuff to the noisy and loud or fast stuff, for example. They say that it is primitive and simple, blah, blah, blah, but that is simply not true. I would [illegible] hierarchy in music, where you say, OK, that is stupid because it is a [illegible] or whatever. I never look at music like that.

Blows against the American empire

The night I meet Alec Empire follows one of the few free days he has snatched all year from touring America and Europe with Atari Teenage Riot. Hardly a holiday, he's in London to oversee the release of *The Geist Of Alec Empire* box set which which he is launching his second label, Geist. And while he's here he's checking up on the progress of his main squeeze, Digital Hardcore Recordings, the London-Berlin based company he set up for Atari Teenage Riot and like spins, whose direction is contained within the manifesto that passes for the label's name. Being a rare break, it gives him the chance to ready two Empire projects for release — the heavily distorted and speed-fixated "Death/Imm" and "No Safety Pin Sex" EPs — as well as a DHR compilation, *Riot Zone* (As a sequel to the 1995 *Harder Than The Rest!!@#$!* comp, the latter brings the DHR story up to date.) In addition, a representative from The Beastie Boys' Grand Royal label, who hold the DHR licence for America, is in waiting to confirm details of the label's US tour (currently [illegible] underway) featuring ATR alongside ECBOR and Shinto. "Let me see, it could be very interesting bringing all these people together for the Americans," stirs Empire with a slightly demented Klaus Kinski-like cackle.

The tour is meant to consolidate ATR's American sorties earlier this year, when they supported the likes of Beck, Wu-Tang Clan and Rage Against The Machine. The significance of ATR's impact on America is how people are picking up on the radical extremity of their position, defined by such songs as "Deutschland (You Gotta Die!)", the "Burn, Berlin, Burn" sequence of "Sick To Death" and "Destroy 2000 Years Of Culture".

"A lot of people made this MC5/Public Enemy comparison, which is a brilliant compliment for me," recalls Empire. "I mean, we always hoped people could take our songs and use them for themselves, because though they might have been written in Germany, they're not connected solely to one territory. We approach Atari Teenage Riot more on a global level. I mean, this is putting it very simply, but I think a capitalist society most of the time produces the same or very similar problems. That is, the structure is the main problem, and it has to be replaced with something more human, and that is applicable in Japan or America or Germany."

Perhaps it's the politics Grand Royal licensed ATR and DHR for, but most likely it is ATR's volatile Molotov cocktails of fender-buckling breakbeats, sampled guitars, siren screeching and the unrelenting three-pronged vocal attack of Empire, Hanin Elias and MC Carl Crack that so intoxicates The Beasties' fratboy pack. Empire rightfully asserts ATR's music is every bit as inventive as his solo output. Just because ATR come on like a lurid, excessively violent Manga comicbook, programmed at flicker-speed with all the sensitivity of a video arcade cop-killer game, certainly doesn't make them less 'artistic' than the Empire solo discs, which are couched in the 'art music' trappings of the Mille Plateaux label. But they're about as likely to win over more refined Manhattan art types as the practitioners of hardcore HipHop inner city reportage who are their closest sonic relation. If their disapproval hardly keeps Empire awake at nights, the disdain of those closer to home in Germany precipitated a soul-searching crisis that eventually led to secession and the founding of the new Empire imprint, Geist, for those experiments outside DHR's Riot Sound manifesto. (Future plans include albums by hard-disc composers Rope, avantish Dutch DJ Like A Tim and Zeit, the group he hopes to share with Dinosaur Jr's J Mascis.)

From Die Kinder to Microchipkinder

At 25, Alec Empire might seem a little young for such a grandly titled triple disc box set retrospective as *The Geist Of*. Yet already he comes across as a seasoned veteran. Born in Berlin in May, 1972, he was weaned on rap, breakdancing and punk. "At the age of eight I started playing the guitar, at ten I was one of the city's best breakdancers, and at 11 I was witness to rap — the first music I ever liked — being commercialised like crazy," he told Simon Reynolds in an interview going out on the DHR Website. The cycle of unbridled enthusiasm, followed by heartbreak and disillusion was a constant through his musical career. "I hated everything and became a punk, only listening to UK punk from 1977, a little US punk, no 1980s Exploited shit. I formed my first band, Die Kinder, who sounded like Dead Boys with German words (so we found out later). At 16 we split up, disillusioned, because we found that punk was dead..."

This was back in 1988. Splitting with his friends, he divided his time listening to Debussy, Schoenberg and Bartók, and playing video games. He also started experimenting with four-track mixes of guitar effects. The results encouraged him "to make music completely independently of the other 'traitors'." The turning point came during the summer spent in Ibiza — stop me if this sounds too much like an Eric Rohmer film — when schoolboy Alec went to his first Acid House party. Falling for Acid head over heels — "it sounded somewhat like atonal pop music, very psychedelic" — he returned to Berlin and got a job in order to buy his first sampler and start doing it himself.

In Germany a year later, the growth of Acid coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall. New, semi-legal clubs like Tresor sprang up in the interzone that opened up between East and West — and flourished so long as the authorities couldn't work out who owned the land and the buildings where they were held. However short-lived, the era cemented in Alec's mind the relationship between politics and music. If the German Left was wrongfooted and subsequently totally demoralised by the collapse of communism throughout Europe, it was replaced as a radical force by the temporary 'autonomous zone of Acid'. "For me personally, Acid had an important political significance," Empire told Reynolds. "Acid meant total protest, not letting anything in from the outside, no political lies, no promotion and therefore immune from the system."

Inevitably, Acid purity was sullied by commerce, but in the Berlin subculture's affections it had already been displaced by Techno. By 1991 Tresor had established a Berlin-Detroit connection, cemented by the arrival in the city of Underground Resistance, and Alec Empire made his live Berlin debut at the tender age of 18. His earliest 12"s were released as English white labels and later through a French organisation TNI. His first German release was the "SuEcide 1-3" EP (1992) on Mille Plateaux-parent label Force Inc, based in Frankfurt.

"I was one of the first people in Berlin who released Techno records," Empire states as a matter of fact. "I was thinking, this music is so exciting and I am one of the first! I mean, that is what some journalists were saying." Indeed, the German magazine *Spex* once described him as one of the first German pop stars of the 90s. "And also Force Inc claimed that the 'SuEcide' EP was one of the first pure breakbeat records to be released outside the UK, which maybe explains why I feel very connected."

global ear

A survey of sounds from around the planet. This month . . .

Auckland

Tony Conrad is incredulous. I've just asked him to sign my original vinyl copy of *Outside The Dream Syndicate*, his 1972 collaboration with German rock extremists Faust. He's stunned that a record which was shunned and reviled at the time of its release could have ended up at the bottom of the world with pride of place in the collection of an intrigued 15 year old — and that now, over 20 years later, the former 15 year old is asking for his autograph. After all, beginning with his membership of the pioneering early 60s Minimalist collective that also included La Monte Young and John Cale, Conrad has spent his creative life exploring music as a radicalised, democratic, collaborative process, eschewing the egocentric/control-driven dictates of classical tradition. He even released an album — 1995's comeback *Slapping Pythagoras* — attacking the entire Pythagorean artistic tradition, ie the history of Western music! "The aristocratic sensibility of emphasising ownership and domination is something I've fought against for many years," Conrad had told me a few days earlier, and I'll leave it for you to decide whether this was a veiled reference to La Monte Young, who continues to claim sole ownership of the tapes recorded by that early 60s group, and refuses to release them.

So the 57 year old New York Professor of Media Studies is about the last person to encourage hero worship. But this *is* the bottom of the world, and even intense intellectuals have to let their guard down occasionally. Conrad happily signs the disc: black ink on black back cover. Earlier in the evening, Chris Knox — unwilling godfather to the international lo-fi avant rock fraternity — had attempted to engage Conrad in some typically Kiwi banter about insipid American beer, eliciting a politely bemused response. Like many visitors to the Antipodes, Conrad uses his Kiwi tour as a vacation opportunity, but he was also hoping that it would provide an opportunity to collaborate creatively with another lo-fi figurehead, The Dead C's Michael Morley. Consequently, Conrad seemed more perturbed that Morley was to be in America during the tour than upset at the tiny audiences for his own performances.

As it happened, Morley was around just long enough to support Conrad at the first of his shows, at Hopetoun Alpha, a beautiful old Christadelphean church recently converted into a New Age venue. Working entirely on computer gear placed amidst the audience, Morley's set was about as much fun as watching paint dry: paint that was cracking and peeling even as it was slapped on the knotty surface. In contrast, Conrad's set was a revelation. Hidden from view behind a fluttering silk curtain, the violinist and his partner, cellist Alexandra Gelenscer, unfurled a visceral, 45 minute meditation on the tonalities of a single, extended note. It was a stunning performance, one which could have been interpreted as a savage, veiled recreation of the violinist's early, suppressed work with Young.

Earlier in the evening, Dean Roberts (in his White Winged Moth guise) performed a solo set for electric guitars placed on moving chairs. Despite the fact that he has lived and worked in America with acclaimed trans-Pacific post-rockers Thela, Roberts is typical of Auckland's improvising musicians, eking out a career in happy isolation.

Auckland is a sprawling suburban metropolis containing well over half of New Zealand's three million population. If it's a little dull on the surface, under the covers there's a wealth of furtive creative activity. Experimental multimedia facility Artspace, kick-started by extra public funding, has made its first tentative forays into music with performances by Conrad, Keiji Haino and Christophe Charles, with Oval due next. But while there are signs that Auckland's modern classical and improvising artists might find audiences in their own city some time soon, for the most part, musicians like Roberts live, create and record here for markets elsewhere.

"There's not much cross-pollination going on in Auckland," he explains. "Everyone here is very insular towards the thing that they're doing, which in some ways is good, because people define an aesthetic of their own in this situation. The downside is that they tend to become very precious about it.

"I'm not complaining, because I'm quite happy functioning the way that I do, but as far as the audiences here are concerned, there are very few people who are enthusiastic and involved and have art dominating their lives. In Auckland, music and art is considered entertainment, not as areas of interest or knowledge."

Despite this, Roberts is happy to live in New Zealand, refining the minutiae of his Improv guitar aesthetic before taking it out to appreciative American audiences.

"In New Zealand I'm not concerned with live performance," he says. "Touring here is ridiculous unless you're a charity. The effect that has had on me and the way I do things is that I'm much more absorbed in the function of playing music. The interaction with other musicians, the discourse that goes on in playing music as an activity, and then a recorded document of the music that comes out of that, is 90 per cent of what I do."

Thela were profoundly influenced by UK avant-collagists This Heat, and Roberts has spent the last year quizzically examining drum 'n' bass and electronic music, without having any aspirations to incorporate them into his own musical aesthetic. Instead, his latest album is inspired by European improvisors, and particularly former Henry Cow guitarist Fred Frith. In America, his music has been linked to both the 80s Flying Nun label and the more recent lo-fi offshoot Corpus Hermeticum, both originally based on New Zealand's South Island, but he says there is no real aesthetic connection. "However, we do share a view that we're not putting that much into our local culture, so we can't expect much out of it!"

Another point of reference is the desire for self-sufficiency. A number of Roberts's albums have been released by the US company Forced Exposure, but for his latest album he has created his own label to allow for more autonomy, while still using the American label for distribution.

Chris Knox was once the subject of a 30 page interview feature in Forced Exposure's in-house magazine. When I met him recently in Auckland he was just back from his annual pilgrimage to the US, and in denial. In the late 70s, Knox, another South Islander, was New Zealand's

Chris Knox

Improvised Music Touring Scheme 1998/99

■ Once again, the Arts Council is offering a limited amount of money for the support of tours by improvised music groups. This support will be available to groups playing mainly improvised music, ie music mostly without any pre-determined harmonic or rhythmic structures. With the help of the 1997/98 scheme, 12 improvising groups were supported, sums ranging from £1100 to £2700.

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■ **Closing date: Thursday 19 February 1998**
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"Most of the time they end up structured into this kind of family thing, and I always hated having to follow these family rules. Of course, what I am doing is extremely up and down, but I feel better doing that than being connected to some scene and I have to always serve it with the stuff, the product according to specifications."

Of course Alec Empire isn't so egoless that self-interest doesn't play a part in his defections. He's highly conscious of his own position in the general scheme of things, and he's most likely to jump ship if he feels himself being manoeuvred by outside pressures into an untenable position.

The end of an affair

1997 began auspiciously enough for Alec Empire. In January he set out on a tour of Germany and Austria with Mille Plateaux labelmates Techno Animal's sound system, joined midway through by DJ Spooky. "When we started, it was great, it was so intense and extreme at a musical level, incredibly creative, and then it turned around so badly," recalls Empire. "I don't know, but if it ended like that everything would be much different now . . " But if the music was intense it was as nothing compared to the heat generated by the between-gig arguments developing between Empire and travelling companion Achim Szepanski, Mille Plateaux's boss philosopher and strategist. Whatever its origins, it flared up into a fullblown aesthetic debate, resulting in Alec feeling totally estranged from the label he'd been with from the beginning. "I still think we have a lot of stuff in common, Achim and me, even on a political level," says Empire, "but more and more through the tour I began to feel the whole thing had completely failed, partly because the audience just didn't care what was behind this music — it was just something they connected to new trends like TripHop or the like — and partly because of some of the other acts on the label. As I said in the *Geist* booklet [which reproduces part of his tour diary], I don't want recognition by a pseudo-intellectual elite, they are, after all, only the small head of the Techno-dinosaur . ."

Aside from Techno Animal, Empire missed both the companionship and audience feedback of the ATR/DHR tours that were increasingly occupying his time. Unsurprising, then, that the running argument with Szepanski almost turned physical when Achim touched on the difference between Empire's Mille Plateaux output and DHR.

"He said, 'At some point, Alec, you are going to end up like Merzbow and the other Japanese artists. I mean, you could compare that to a fascist approach with the amount of noise you have, which is why Industrial music in the early 80s led to a lot of right wing stuff.' We had a very serious fight over that, because I find that a very conservative way of looking at music."

To Alec Empire, speed and noise are the fast route to euphoria. "It gets the adrenaline pumping," he explains. "If you compare *Otis Redding Live At Monterey* — a really important record for Atari Teenage Riot — when Otis sings "Shake" the applause of the audience is the noise, the rhythm is way funky, very fast, a lot faster than the original, a lot of shouting . . . pure energy. Well, with Atari Teenage Riot live, we don't wait for the audience, it is information overload straight away."

The fallout from the fight left them both damaged, indirectly or otherwise. "I was seriously depressed for two months after the tour," relates Alec. And, from the *Geist* sleeve again: "The word has become more powerful than the sound . ."

Blows against Alec Empire

Achim Szepanski is not about to deny that, unlike most labels, who are after a new sound, Mille Plateaux began with an "open concept", an "open system" derived from their mentor, the late Gilles Deleuze's theory of the rhizome.

From the start, it appears that Szepanski has not been properly informed about the rationale behind Alec Empire's Geist label and box set. He had the impression Alec only wanted to release the Geist compilation in the non-German speaking territories. "We had some discussions during the tour, which were full of stress," comments a somewhat perplexed Szepanski, over the phone from Frankfurt, "but we haven't really discussed anything in the last two months, partly because I was sick for a while and have had no chance to contact him. Maybe our concepts of electronic music are different, maybe more than I thought. . I always thought Alec's Mille Plateaux albums were his strength, his lifeline to leave the Atari Teenage Riot thing, if he wanted, because for me ATR is kind of a retro rock thing, not the thing we do. But ATR is not Merzbow, and so far as I know, Alec has never made a noise album . . I am not 100 per cent against noise, and I wouldn't say it is fascist, but the language of digital noise is more interesting than using guitars . . I know Alec has some problems with other MP groups like Oval and Microstoria, because they have a student audience, while in Germany ATR appeal more to the kids.

"But a lot of our artists are not 100 per cent behind Mille Plateaux. It's an open system and there is space for as many concepts as there are plateaux. The differences we have shouldn't be a problem. We have a thousand plateaux and there is still one plateau for Alec."

The Empire strikes back

Empires only begin to fall when the men of action who built them succumb to the civilisation virus. So the action man in the still youthful Alec Empire overrides the cool head that might be able to engage Achim Szepanski in abstract discussions of art and philosophy. But, as ATR's samurai-like do-or-die approach attests, music is a matter of life and death, and he is egotistically young enough to take any blow against any part of his empire personally. Thus so, he has set up Geist to rescue his solo output from Mille Plateaux's abstract realm, which too heavily influenced the way they were received, and restore them as Empire works.

"Because I was releasing them on Mille Plateaux," Empire concludes, "I think a lot of people placed me in the wrong field. I thought that by releasing *The Geist Of* . . , mixing and changing the order of the tracks, I can disconnect it from the associations Mille Plateaux has. For me this box set is like a new start, because until now the [illegible] of their original releases through Mille Plateaux was not properly closed."

The Geist Of Alec Empire, *"Deathfunk", "No Safety Pin Sex" and DHR's* Riot Zone *are available now (all through SRD)*

Coming of age in the era of digital reproduction has had a profound effect on Alec Empire. He tends to see the world through a clubland haze, with the dancefloor as the battleground of musical, social and political ideas, and the battle itself becoming both the subject and the motivation of his music. As the title implies, "SuEcide" was intended as "a hymn to self-destruction", a paean to Germany's Ecstasy-addicted middle-class rave scene to waste their money and themselves on drugs and, once penniless and on welfare, they'd become such a drain on government resources, they'd bring about its downfall. (Incidentally, burning on natural energy, Alec doesn't do drugs.) More significantly, as one of its earliest releases, "SuEcide" was the foundation of Empire's relationship with Force Inc's Achim Szepanski, later the brains behind the Deleuze-derived Mille Plateaux imprint.

Meanwhile in Berlin, at least in Empire's version of events, the coming neo-Nazification of Techno struck another of those disillusioning blows that sent him reeling in search of new allies and new noise configurations.

"For, like, two years from 1990-91, I was very euphoric about Techno because I thought it could destroy the music traditions that we had in the 80s. Then the scene made more and more compromises to get radio plays and sell more and more records, tickets for raves. With that, of course, came the political developments in Germany, so we thought, OK, now we have to make a statement again."

The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle Part 94

"You have to see that Atari Teenage Riot was formed out of nothing," Empire emphasises. "It was an idea, a theory to do that, you know."

One thing about Empire, he's never gone too big on theory, despite his parallel career as a solo artist with the brainiacs at Force Inc/Mille Plateaux. If they were originally conceived as a money making scam to rip off a major label for the start-up capital for their own label, ATR was also an outlet for its three members to hit out at the neo-Nazi racism that scarred post-reunification euphoria in Germany. Consisting of Alec, Damascan singer Hanin Elias and MC Carl Crack, from Swaziland, they could partially speak from direct experience. But after releasing the clarion call "Hetzjagd Auf Nazis" ("Hunt For Nazis") on Force Inc in 1992, they devised a strategy to hook an advance from the record industry hungry to capitalise on the rave scene: they sold themselves as a pre-Prodigy commercial Technopunk cross between Sigue Sigue Sputnik and 2Unlimited. But with added bloodlust. In 1993 Phonogram Records took the bait and released two singles, including "Kids R United" based on the Sham 69 hit. The non-recoupable advance secured, ATR delivered tapes for a defiantly non-commercial album, which Phonogram predictably turned down, leaving the group free to launch Digital Hardcore Recordings (company slogan: 'Riot sounds produce riots') in 1994.

Unfortunately, they didn't emerge unscathed. The scam-weary British music press reacted suspiciously to the whole Phonogram hype and remain wary of the group today. As it happens it didn't really matter. For, fuelled on their feeling of betrayal by Techno and their anger at political developments in Germany, ATR established themselves as a formidable live act, which quickly built up a following throughout Germany and Europe, and, later, America and Japan. If Empire had any self-doubts about ATR's comicbook calls to revolution, which so offend PC types who read popular cultural artefacts as damaging designs for living, he felt thoroughly vindicated during a Far East tour DJing Digital Hardcore material in such unlikely territories as Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta and the heavily authoritarian Singapore.

He recalls: "In Singapore, the Goethe Institute had to hide the event behind this kind of German electronic umbrella thing, because normally something like this would never happen there. I DJed and even did a short live show for about 30 minutes with the very simple equipment I had with me. There were about 20 security people in front of me waiting for somebody to do something wrong, like, take drugs or what-have-you, and I was passing out these messages from Atari records, like from the end of "Deutschland (Has Gotta Die!)" with the sample *"The time is right to fight"*. The security people were coming back to me, saying, listen, stop or turn it down, so I continued playing all these drug samples from *Generation Star Wars* about LSD, you know? And people in the audience were going, 'Yeah!', because all this stuff was completely forbidden, and the security people were totally angry about it. That was another moment when I felt this makes so much sense."

Most surprising for Empire was how some people were already familiar with his material. "I mean, they couldn't buy it. They had got most of the information from the Internet. But now I think the government is trying to restrict access to the Net."

A dream of belonging

A simple paradox governs the digital diaspora: the more the Net brings people together around the world, the farther it keeps them apart. And though many celebrate the era of digital reproduction for its liberation of artists from the culture industry's record/release/tour cycle by giving them the means to produce music in their own time and, if necessary, the tiny space of their bedroom, these are exactly the isolating aspects of the technology that Alec Empire has come to distrust. "I hate the fact of just being an electronic musician alone with a computer," Empire spits. "That is why I do Atari Teenage Riot."

"I mean," he continues, "most of this year I have spent touring with Atari Teenage Riot, because for me working with other people — well, I wouldn't even call it working — doing music live is a very important part. And I think one reason why so much electronic music is so boring nowadays is because it's maybe one person wanking in front of the computer, just like some Heavy Metal guitarist, and then it gets very soulless."

But to the outsider, his five Mille Plateaux albums no doubt come across as archetypal Electronica. From the early breakbeat trials documented in *Limited Editions 1990-94*, through the ghostly dubs and dronescapes of *Low On Ice*, the more abrasive *Generation Star Wars* to the two 1996 masterpieces *Hypermodern Jazz 2000.5* and *Les Étoiles Des Filles Mortes*, they each evolve powerful narratives out of the seeming simplicity of their construction. They might consist of clearly defined, speedy or trance rhythm loops intersecting with concise electronic brush strokes, and little else, excepting perhaps a playful sample from which the track derives its title and tone, or a stray sequencer pattern dubbed in and out of the mix. As the title suggests, 1996's *Hypermodern Jazz* anticipates Squarepusher's drum 'n' bass excursions in jazz, but it isn't only just that. Yet if rogue elements intrude on all the discs, making them impossible to pigeonhole according to genre, they're often as not marked by Empire's responses to new styles.

But as *The Geist Of Alec Empire* compilation shows, he has always been deft enough not to allow his music to be defined by the trends he's invariably been willing to swear allegiance to. For the most baffling aspect of Alec Empire is his dream of belonging. Where many a lesser artist denies any knowledge of others in the same field, Empire thrives on movements. Fired by the shared pleasures and goals of a community of like spirits, he's willing to risk the dissolution of his individuality for the new heights the music might attain in the process.

"The thing was, in the beginning I never really saw myself as an individualist," says Empire. "In 1990-91 it was Techno, then the German drum 'n' bass scene in 93-94, and the DHR scene peaked around our Suicide Club in Berlin in 1995. The time in between is always like my worst nightmare because as old as I get, I think maybe at some point I won't belong to one at all ever again.

"When I talk about something like an underground," he clarifies, "I don't even mean something that doesn't sell a lot of records, I just mean a group of people where you exchange information and there is a context all the time for when you do stuff."

Before you enrol him in the Tufty Club, bear in mind Empire is driven by an equally powerful Breton-in-reverse tendency to expel himself from all the movements he's belonged to when their identifying traits solidify into conventions.

Dean Roberts

own self-mutilating punk in the notorious Toy Love. In the early 80s he instigated the self-sufficiency ethos of the Flying Nun label with his group Tall Dwarfs. But he is best known as the musician most often credited/blamed for introducing the home-recording aesthetic that lead to the eventual explosion of lo-fi as a genre. 15 years on from his first home-based solo recordings, however, Knox laughs at the lo-fi tag.

"The difference between what we were doing and what some of the lo-fi kids have been doing is that they were trying to degrade things in order to get a sound that was different. We were trying to record as best we could," he explains. "I've always insisted that I've never been lo-fi. I've been lo-tech in that our fidelity to the sounds that were being produced was actually higher than that which has been transmuted through a lot of effects and an enormous amount of studio trickery. Lo-fi was hi-tech but lo-fi. What we were doing was lo-tech but hi-fi, fidelity being truthfulness, and we were being truthful to what was being emitted."

The lo-fi approach got so ridiculous, claims Knox, that "it got the to point where people were adding hiss to their records to make them more commercial within the lo-fi brotherhood. And it was very much a brotherhood, there weren't many sisters involved!"

Now aged 40, Knox is a happily married family man living in the hippy suburb of Grey Lynn, surrounded by his wife's sculptures, mewling cats and teenage progeny. Always a pop musician at heart with a certain adoration for experimental mavericks, his latest solo release contains a 17 minute noise collage tribute to The Beatles' "Revolution Number 9".

Although Knox could tour in America and Europe indefinitely, he refuses to leave his home for more than a few weeks each year. His performances are still manic, but he finds American audiences far too intense. "They take me very seriously. For some people the humour goes right past them, they just want to get to the angst. When I go to a new city where they've been waiting to see me since 1982 or something, they'll be sitting there waiting for every word, and I get up there and do something really dumb, and this idol fractures before their eyes. Some of them can't handle the amateurishness, the ineptitude. But for some of them it adds an extra dimension." **GARY STEEL**

PHOTOS: CHRIS KNOX: FORCED EXPOSURE; DEAN ROBERTS: EMILY CORMACK

These are difficult times for Jungle. If Reprazent winning the Mercury Music Prize hasn't bad enough (what scene could survive such a seal of mainstream, middlebrow approval?), Jungle has been ousted from its three year old status as *the* London underground sound by the advent of Speed Garage. Lured by its 'classy'-but-torrid R&B vocals and designer-label-flaunting, champagne-swigging, no-trainers-allowed ethos of 'living large', much of Jungle's black audience has defected to this most recent dancefloor mutation. The astonishingly fast conversion of jump-up Junglists to Speed Garage was hastened by the emergence of an earlier mutant breakbeat strain, the essentially white Industrial-like dirgecore of Techstep, as typified by the productions of the No U Turn label, which carried Jungle so far from its roots in rave and ragga that by early this year many scenesters were complaining about a surfeit of 'disgusting' tracks, drenched in distortion and devoid of melody.

Ironically, many of the most subterranean producers in drum 'n' bass have since moved decisively away from Techstep towards a new sound — although not one that's likely to win back the converts to Speed Garage. Hardly known for its semantic restraint, the drum 'n' bass community has failed to come up with a term for the new style, although some mutter about "nu-dark" or tracks that are "dark but technical". Since discourse abhors a vacuum, I'm pitching in with my own genre designation: neurofunk. If No U Turn-style Techstep is defined by deliberately dirty production, bombastic riffs and an explosive psychosis, this new sound is about obsessive-compulsive cleanliness of production, eerie electronic blips 'n' blurts, ultra-complicated basslines, and an implosive neurosis. Techstep classics such as Trace/Nico's "Squadron" sound like a maniac running amok, neurofunk tracks sound like a stalker, furtive and morbidly fixated.

The first hints of this new direction were audible late last year. At the time, Doc Scott's awesome Nasty Habits track "Shadow Boxing" seemed like a pinnacle for Techstep. Actually, it was the prototype for neurofunk, with its glacial, Numanoid synth-motif lowering like some cosmic scowl, and a two-step rhythm that made the track feel like it was jogging along at 85 beats per minute instead of 170. By the time the "Shadow Boxing Remix" surfaced this summer, the groove had stiffened even

2 STEPS

Jungle's latest mutant offspring is **neurofunk** — a glacial, scalpel-sharp **Matrix**, **Optical**, **Source Direct**, **Johnny L**, **John B**, and their mentor

[illegible] — to the point of rigor mortis — while the flipside "March" crystallised the [illegible] neurofunk norm with its monotonously chugging beat and acrid emissions [illegible] time. Only the low frequency seismic tremors of bassline pressure [illegible] Doc Scott tracks to the kind of kinetic, hypertensile Jungle he was [illegible] three years ago.

[illegible] for Techstep in 96, Groovender, as both DJ and label head, has [illegible] Godfather-like role all year long vis-a-vis neurofunk, premiering

Optical

BACK

hybrid created by a secretive breed of young, science-obsessed producers: **Grooverider**. Words: Simon Reynolds. Photography: Amy & Tanveer

Source Direct

dubplates by new producers such as Matrix, Optical and John B, and releasing their tracks on his Prototype label. Groovender has also helped codify the neurofunk sound with his own Codename John productions, "The Warning"/"Structure Of Red" on Metalheadz, and the forthcoming "Enigma" on Prototype. With its Mace-like squirts of astringent synth and squelchy, non-Jungalistic groove, "The Warning" opened up a whole new technoid path for drum 'n' bass. "Warned", the alternative version of the "The Warning" on the *Grooverider Presents The Prototype Years* compilation, is even better. Seemingly steeped as much in Acid House as Jungle, the track's viscous, mucus-like textures make you feel like you're being stalked by some ravenous and implacable snot-monster.

The year's ultimate neurofunk track, however, is Jonny L's "Piper", with its metronomic two-step beat, ghostly Ambient FX and affectless female voice reciting the title like a Dalek. If the original wasn't clenched and clammy enough, Grooverider's remix transforms it into a disconcertingly assymetrical robo-funk groove that's closer to Front 242 than Ganja Kru. On the remix's flipside, "Obedience" reminds me of A Certain Ratio — sickly, wilting drones hang dank and dismal over a rudimentary shuffle beat and a quagmire of glutinous bass-goo. It's so mausoleum cold in here, you can almost see your breath. In early 80s death-disco fashion, the three elements of "Obedience" seem to have an arbitrary relationship to each other, the track grasps for funkiness without ever quite getting on-the-one. But then, like the avant-funk of ACR and 23 Skidoo, neurofunk is a contradiction in terms anyway: the raunchy etymological roots of 'funk' — a West African word meaning 'positive sweat', Afro-American slang for a woman's sex-smell — have long faded away, replaced by a cyborg's distant memory of the body.

Matrix

Check the review column written by the staff of the London Jungle shop Black Market for the club culture 'zine *Mixmag* — virtually every promo and dubplate is described as a two-step. Close to the defining attribute of neurofunk, the two-step is a simple kick-snare rhythm that doesn't even sound like a breakbeat anymore. *The Wire*'s Chris Sharp compares it to Tamla Motown or the skinhead moonstomp. Where the mashed-up, hyper-syncopated breaks of Jungle demanded extravagantly posthuman physical responses, making dancers strive for a hybrid of bodypoppin' breaker, contortionist and Tex Avery cartoon character, the two-step incites much more rudimentary rhythmic reflexes: the feet trudge, the head jerks and the torso folds at the waist like a pen-knife.

"It's the easiest break to do," says Phil Aslet, one half of production team Source Direct. "There are no real flutters in the snares or the hi-hats. It's a straight-up, easy rhythm to get people on the dancefloor."

Although Source Direct have shaped neurofunk's palette of atmospherics with such brilliant tracks as "Two Masks", "Enemy Lines" and "Black Domina" — all spectral spaces, avant-classical atonality, glaring brass stabs and strings that attack like the ravens in Hitchcock's *The Birds* — the duo have so far shunned the two-step option in favour of fitful full-kit funk. Aslet says that he and partner Jim Baker are still too enamoured of the breakbeat's possibilities. But virtually everyone else on the scene seems to be retreating from breakbeat science towards the simplicity and rigour of the two-step.

The weird thing about neurofunk is that drum 'n' bass seems to be turning back into Techno, albeit a brittle, staccato, non-hypnotic variant. All year, the synth-and-sample textures have harked back to the analogue sounds of the pre-breakbeat era: bleep 'n' bass (LFO, Sweet Exorcist, Forgemasters, Unique 3, Rhythmatic), Acid House's Roland 303 (revived on Dillinja's "Acid Trak"), even the angular Orientalism of mid-80s synth-pop (Thomas Leer, Sylvian/Sakomoto, John Foxx, Gary Numan's later 'funky' output). Listen to recent tracks by Bristol Junglist DJ Krust, "Soul In Motion", "Future Unknown" and "The Last Day", and you hear curiously inhibited, coerced grooves overlaid with drone-swathes, melted sound-shapes, timbral smears, stereo-panning wooshes, and disconcerting belches 'n' burbles of grotesquely distorted electronics. Amazingly, a scene that began with Shut Up And Dance and

Human Resource has evolved towards the brink of Stockhausen-esque electroacoustic sound-daubs

Even the scientific imagery seems more redolent of Techno than Jungle artist names like Genotype, Isotope, Cyborgz, Cybernet Vs Genetix, titles like "Telemetry", "DNA", "Genetic Manipulation", *Controlled Developments* (a Source Direct mini-LP available only in America) For Phil Aslet, such dry, dispassionate imagery reflects the fact that "We're technical people Our music isn't an in-your-face thing that's going to sell millions of copies, it's more of a creation that you have to read, like a book." Detached from their own, hopefully devastating creations, neurofunk producers are like lab researchers working on nuclear missiles, or gene-splicers designing viral pathogens for biological warfare And military research, after all, is the avant garde of science

The scientific imagery also seems to reflect the modus operandi (as Photek titled his debut album — pure neuro!), the weeks of incredibly intensive and fastidious labour that go into the average drum 'n' bass track. Listening, you can hear the conditions under which the music came into being bodies rigid with tension as they click the mouse, eyes fucked by the red-eye effects of ganja and staring at a computer screen all day Neurofunk is the culmination of the perfectionist tendency in drum 'n' bass, where artists like Photek and Boymerang devote months of ten-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week toil to construct a single eight minute track. (By way of contrast, No U Turn's Techstep tracks are completed in a single all night session) Source Direct's "Two Masks" track took two months of trial-and-error and "deep concentration" to finish Where once producers would construct tracks entirely out of loops, in neurofunk you'll increasingly hear noises and effects that are used just once "Two Masks" is riddled with sonic singularities and one-off surprises, designed, says Aslet, to ambush the listener

“Complicated patterns and edits tend to miss the point that this music is about flow, rhythm and the funk”

Some of the new breed of neurofunksters are actual scientists. Groovender protege John B is a 19 year old student of genetics and cell biology at Durham University, who cites his influences as Throbbing Gristle and Stockhausen Like Techno before it, drum 'n' bass been taken over by boffins Listen to Groovender's Kiss FM show — where once the station ident voice-overs came from ruffneck types, now you'll hear phrases like "cutting edge beats" recited in the middle-class-but-trying-to-sound-street-credible accents of Matrix's Jamie Quinn and Boymerang's Graham Sutton

Quinn and his brother Matt, who records under the name Optical, are the rising stars of neurofunk. Operating out of West London's Hammersmith/Shepherd's Bush area, the brothers have released two records via Jamie's own Metro label — Matrix's "Double Vision"/"Sedation" and Optical's "Shining"/"Dark Skies" — plus a host of tracks for other imprints, including Formation's experimental sub-label New Identity Matt Quinn is also starting his own Virus label with No U Turn affiliate Ed Rush, and doing engineering/production work on Groovender's debut album for Columbia Confirming his man-of-the-moment status, he also helped Goldie construct the hour-long breakbeat-and-40-piece-orchestra epic "Mother", the centrepiece of the forthcoming sequel to *Timeless*

The highpoints of the Quinn brothers' output so far include Matrix's chromium-plated two-stepper "Mute" and Optical's slinky-but-sinister fluoro-funker "Grey Odyssey" (both on *Groovender Presents The Prototype Years*), and a shared EP for Metalheadz. On the latter, Optical's "To Shape The Future" and "Raging Calm" are two of this year's most astonishing slices of drum 'n' bass futurism amorphous surges of drone-bass, distressed R2D2 bleeps, and sampladelic ooze with an abject-but-inorganic quality, like the cyber-lymph frothing out of the haemorrhaging android in *Alien*

According to Matt Quinn, ""To Shape The Future" was my angry reaction to the diluted crap that seemed to come out of the initially interesting 'intelligent' drum 'n' bass camp", while "Raging Calm" was "influenced by the sounds of 70s jazz funk but also trying to reflect the chaos of 90s life beneath the calm exterior" In a lot of ways, neurofunk does represent a kind of truce between Techstep and its former foe, 'intelligent' drum 'n' bass, merging the former's edgy, let-the-bad-times-roll vibe with the latter's pristine production and atmospheric textures The new breed of neuro producers — John B, Skynet, Psion — often sound like they were probably still making LTJ Bukem/Moving Shadow style Ambient softcore or jazzy Jungle only a year ago

John B's debut album *Visions* is split into two CDs, subtitled "Organic" and "Synthetic" The first disc contains jazz-step workouts like "Sax Therapy", featuring real horn and flute solos, and programmed basslines that sound horribly close to slap-bass But the "Synthetic" disc is pure neuro, replacing the first disc's fluency with unswinging two-step beats, plasma-morphic bass-tendrils and cryogenic synths, leavened by the odd jazzy flourish or Vangelis-like Ambient wash Other names to look out for in this fusion-*noir* zone include Blade, Isotope, Kraken and Decoder (whose alter-ego name Technical Itch captures perfectly neurofunk's obsessive-compulsive tendency), along with labels like Audio Blueprint, Noir, Chemical Warfare and Smooth

The neurofunk sound has also spread to more

Johnny L

PHOTO OF JOHNNY L WOLFGANG

established sectors of drum 'n' bass The Reinforced label's new roster — Vortexion, The Sonar Circle, Arcon 2, Procedure 769 — shun two-step minimalism in favour of full-kit clatter, but share the neurofunksters' pathological intricacy of production At the other end of the breakbeat spectrum, neurofunk's sci-fi vibe has infected such formerly jump-up affiliated producers as Swift (check his amazingly bleak and frigid "Load") and Andy C (whose collaborations with Shimon, "Recharge", "Mutation" and "Genetix", are riddled with queasy bass-gurgles and fizzy electronics)

Judging by their latest release, Trace and Nico's "Cells"/"Copies", even No U Turn have abandoned bombast for stealth and distortion for cavernous clarity Chiming in with neurofunk's scientific imagery, both tracks feature samples of scientists talking about cell formation, while the label's engineer-producer Nico Sykes describes No U Turn's imminent releases as "research" On "Cells" and "Copies", the No U Turn sound is drifting towards neurofunk, swapping Techstep's headbanger bass-riffs for complex, clinical and glossily-textured basslines At No U Turn HQ, the buzzword of the hour appears to be "funky" "Cells" is described as a "two-bar funk switch" (whatever that is), while one-time rock bassist Nico has been enthusing about Stanley Clarke's "School Days" and fantasising about working with Bootsy Collins Ed Rush has a collaboration with Optical forthcoming entitled "Funktion"

John B

Matt Quinn defends the current vogue for two-step simplicity as a back-to-basics return to da funk, and a timely retreat from the baroque excesses of breakbeat science "Unless they're extremely well thought out, complicated patterns and edits tend to miss the point that this music, in all its forms, is about flow, rhythm and the funk It's not about who can spend a week programming the most complicated drum track ever" But while the beats have become less complex — to the point of sounding like drum machines rather than looped breakbeats — everything else about neurofunk has become more labour-intensive and highly finessed, from the ultra-crisp production to the pretzel-like multiple basslines

There's no doubt that neurofunk has produced some of 1997's most striking and accomplished music But there's something about the style that leaves me cold This is the most alienated and obsessive 'dance' music since Cabaret Voltaire circa *Microphonies* or Material circa "Ciguri" That's no small achievement. But at times it seems like producers are wilfully excising all the things that made Jungle so exciting in the first place — the polyrhythmic exuberance, the explosive joy, the ruffneck boisterousness — simply because those elements have been co-opted by the mainstream and ended up in TV adverts and on David Bowie albums

“Neurofunk producers are like gene-splicers designing viral pathogens for biological warfare”

Shunning obvious and crowd-pleasing characteristics — anthemic hooks, rinse-out breakdowns — neurofunk is a music of timbral tweakings and endlessly recessive nuances. In this respect, the style reflects a triumph for the kind of obsessive production techniques pioneered by Photek. *Modus Operandi* might have been received by many as a disappointment, but so many tracks released this year share his music's oddly amnesiac effect (compelling while you listen, but afterwards you can't remember much about it) and numbing avoidance of explicit moods or emotions ("The absence of feeling sort of becomes the feeling," as he told Chris Sharp, optimistically, in *The Wire* 159)

Since neurofunk represents drum 'n' bass's latest attempt to alienate all but its most committed connoisseurs, where next for the scene? Jungle's populist core has withered away most of London's pirate radio stations have switched to playing Speed Garage, recent jump-up events like The Roast have been almost empty "A lot of the dread side of Jungle has gone into the Speed Garage," says Phil Aslet, referring to the dancehall reggae fans originally lured into Jungle by its ragga samples back in 1994 Not only have those people left the scene, but Jungle's sonic repertoire of rude-ness has migrated wholesale to Speed Garage, too the ragga soundbites, the timestretched vocals, the booming sub-bass, all can be now heard fully assimilated and uproariously revitalised in a defining UK Garage track such as Ruff Da' Menace's "Kick The Party Into Full Effect"

Of course, it's precisely these rude-boy/B-boy elements that neurofunk has shed as part of its re-alignment with Techno and Acid House Drum 'n' bass seems to be on the verge of redefining itself as, and refining itself into, a purist genre comparable to the Detroit-pietist Techno-phunk of labels such as Soma, Ifach, Ferox and Peacefrog, and artists like Ian D'Brien, Funk D'Void, Mark Broom and Russ Gabriel It's a realm where labels are referred to as 'imprints', tracks come cloaked with concepts and highly-designed sleeves, and the uppermost ceiling for sales is about 2000 copies Caught between its reluctance to abandon the dancefloor totally for no-rules headfuck, and its squeamish disdain for the full-on fervour of the rave, this semi-experimental genre of 'abstract dance' suffered a humiliation of sorts earlier this year, when Colin Faver's long-running Techno show on Kiss FM was dropped to make way for a Happy Hardcore programme In that hideous, hilarious irony ('proper' Techno displaced by the rave fodder it had always sneered at) lies a warning for the neurofunk tendency, and for its patron Groovender, who has his own Kiss FM show based around a similar 'progressive' ethos to Faver's

Grooverider

Purist Techno originally defined itself against the cheesy-ness of hardcore rave and handbag House — 'cheese' meaning the corny-but-effective elements in music — by dedicating itself to the pursuit of endless subtleties The thing about cheese, though, is that it creates flava and increases the phat content of any given music When it comes to cheese, I'll choose a pungent cliche over an insipid subtlety any day In fact, the entire history of dance music is about the creation of potent cliches — sounds and effects so good that other people couldn't resist copying and caning them to death Cliches like disco's snare-crash, Acid House's faecal Roland 303 bass, Garage's skipping snares, rave's Morse code-like piano vamps, Hardcore's "Mentasm"-stabs, Jungle's "Amen" breaks and dread-bass, gabba's distorted kick-drum, and the EQing/phasing/filtering effects used by House producers from DJ Pierre to Daft Punk.

To invent a cliche from scratch is a great feat What worries me is that the neurofunk school of drum 'n' bass is not generating any potent cliches, just a series of subtle tweaks and involuted nuances Techstep was a slight return to the broad strokes and bombastic sweeps of Belgian Hardcore circa 1991 A year ago, I thought Techstep's destiny involved fusing with gabba and German gloomcore, thereby promising the reintegration of the original pan-European hardcore rave of the early 90s But now, drum 'n' bass seems more likely to link arms with the abstractions of Cristian Vogel and Surgeon, a far less appealing prospect Amazing records will still regularly surface, for sure, there's too much history, too strong a community of knowledge, for it all to peter away But neurofunk represents yet another step away from Jungle's roots in rave, and a two-step trudge towards a not-so-bright future as one of those not-really-that-danceable dance music genres that appeals only to headnodders and trainspotters ☐ *For a neurofunk discography, turn to page 68*

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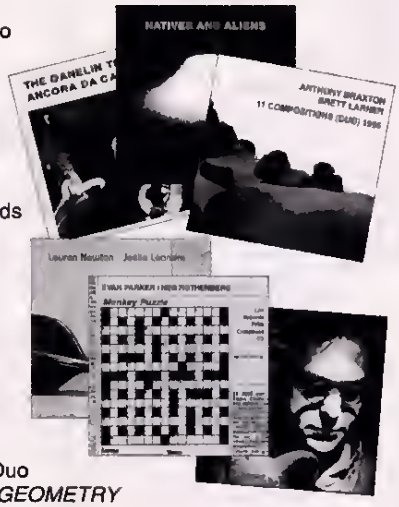

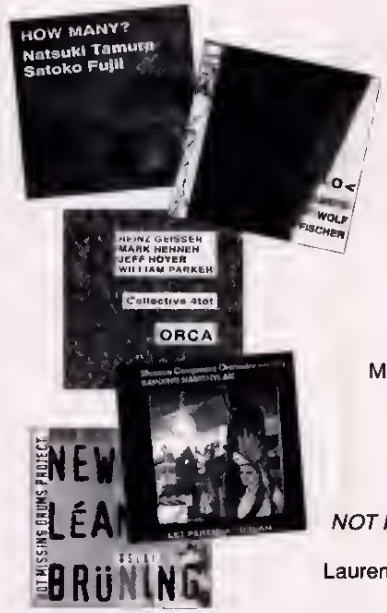

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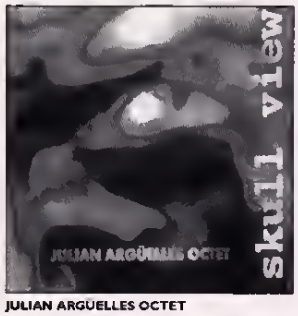

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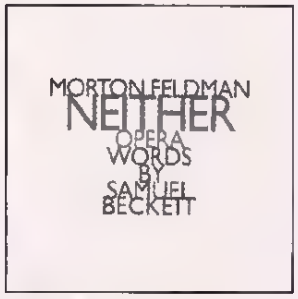

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rising high

Irish composer **Roger Doyle** risks the wrath of God by reconstructing the Tower of Babel as a mammoth, multidimensional electroacoustic work built on musical blocks from around the world. Words: John L Walters

Roger Doyle's *Babel Project* is a sprawling collection of electroacoustic compositions, each of which marks out a space somewhere in the biblical Tower of Babel, whose occupants suffered divine punishment for improving their language skills conclusive proof that God is an Englishman Deploying samples, speech, ambience, reverberation and dazzling editing techniques, his Babel is constructed from wildly different tape pieces, representing the stairwell, temple, mansard, garden room, dressing room, squat and so on. Originally intended for two CDs, Doyle has already amassed enough material for five volumes, and who's to know if it will stop there? For the tower is turning out to be a perfect structure for accommodating its architect's ambition for a multidimensional music work incorporating all the different styles and idioms he enjoys working in, while providing plenty of room for guest collaborators. The *Babel Project* is imaginary, yet you can hear references and influences from the real world, a kind of audio magical realism with colourful hybrids of unknown tongues

Doyle's background includes a sound classical training at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (winning prizes in the Dublin Symphony Orchestra's competition) and electronic music studies at the University of Utrecht Institute of Sonology He has written much theatre music (including a score for Stephen Berkoff's production of *Salome*) and performed as pianist, improvising drummer and an actor But as he gained confidence as a professional composer, he decided to abandon the prevailing wisdom that he should "find a mature style, stick to it and develop it" When the mental image came to him of a mile-high building, "like something from *Blade Runner*", he was liberated The

tower's construction allowed him to make a virtue of working in many different styles. Indeed, over the past five years or so, most of his work has found a space in the tower.

So far two volumes of *Babel* have made it to disc. Last year's *Volume 1* is built on the conceit of a radio station, KBBL, run from the tower. It comprises the spoof "Morning Show" and "Entertainments & Leisure Pursuits Show", complete with fake pop/radio songs, outside broadcasts interrupted by static, bizarre personal ads and genuine radio DJs. *Volume 2* is an altogether scarier proposition. Once you make it through the rapid-fire sample manipulation of "Entry Level I", you are stranded in the isolationist wilderness of "Mr Brady's Room" — a piece commissioned by Canadian guitarist Tim Brady.

Though the *Babel Project* is only two volumes old, many talented soloists have come to stay there, among them saxophonist Jo O'Grady, violinist Juliette Kang and clarinetist/singer Cindy Cummings. *Volume 2* features "Yunnus", an extraordinary mini-concerto for French horn featuring Canadian player Lorraine Fader. She approached Doyle when he was working at the Canadian Banff Centre for the Arts. "She said, Can I be in Babel?" recalls Doyle. "I had no ideas for French horn, but we went in the studio and took things off it

and pulled things out and deconstructed the instrument. . . . I have over an hour of stuff on tape . . . "

His working relationship with Fader is a good example of how different rooms with various collaborators — usually just one other musician — come together.

"I ask performers to start in one of two directions: one is stuff that cannot be notated and the other is stuff that is outside Western art music. In Canada they call it *musique actuelle*, music which mixes not only different styles but also cultures. You'll have a Turkish singer in on top of a *musique concrète* piece . . . it's loosely electroacoustic music, but with ethnic and pop culture influences thrown in.

"I asked Lorraine to do heavily ornamented lines to begin with . . . things with so much detail, like in ethnic singing, that you can't possibly notate because there are too many ornaments going on in the line. Also multiphonics and singing and all those extended techniques to see what happens . . . to try and find something that sounds like an ethnic culture that doesn't exist."

In some cases Doyle notates a score after the recording. "Lorraine Fader has said that she'll do "Yunnus" in concert, learning it from the tape. She wanted the whole hour of material that I recorded of her in order to remind herself of how she got to certain sounds!"

Doyle's international reputation is growing — he has a track on the next *Electroclips* compilation released by Jean-François Denis's Empreintes Digitales label, and he recently won the Bourges international eletroacoustic prize with "Spirit Levels 1-4" (chosen from 550 entries). He's also been back to the Dutch sonology course several times as a guest composer/lecturer.

I asked Doyle if he thought there was a formal, theoretical way in which electroacoustic music could be taught or analysed. "No. Because if you take the simple example of a sequencer and a sampler, for instance, you can very quickly learn to do something which sounds reasonably OK, but which sounds very much like everyone else. If you really want to do something different, the training won't be much good to you.

"The piece that won the Bourges prize — that was done mainly with a sequencer and a sampler, the technology that everybody knows how to use, but I fed in the craziest of long complex samples and out comes this stuff which doesn't sound like sampler and sequencer at all. But yet it is.

"The way I work with the more electronically based sounds is similar to the way I work with the soloist: I like to gather a lot of material and spend weeks editing it down."

When asked whether he ever used other people's records as raw sound sources, he was quick to reject the plunderphonic method. Using other people's material is not his way at all.

"No. I don't know why I don't do that. Maybe it's some sort of old-fashioned ethics! I won't let myself do it. I've got all the imagination and enough equipment so why can't I . . . ? But there is an underlying 'Babellian' concept behind all I do. The means by which I find these sounds can be quite bizarre. I load up my sampler with a lot of complex sounds and sometimes I'll take a sample of the stuff that comes out — you have this sample which is quite complex, made up of the detritus of other samples. Samples behave very strangely in complex situations. Strange alchemy happens."

Occasionally he makes a piece that could never go into Babel — there's a Doyle opus for Uilleann pipes and electronics (on the CD *Contemporary Irish Music Vol Two*) that has no place booked in the tower. Is it perhaps too Irish for Babel?

"I would say there is absolutely no trace of Irishness anywhere in my work, but nevertheless that piece, by the fact that I used this well-known Irish instrument completely out of context, must have something . . .

"I have a complex relationship with being Irish. I feel a stranger in my own country, so I'm coming to grips, very slowly, with the idea of being Irish. I know it's hugely successful and I'll be very unpopular for saying anything against it, but I feel that 'Irish music' has been marketed as a soft misty thing and that disgusts me. The short answer is: there is nothing of Ireland in Babel, but there might be." □ Babel Volumes 1 & 2 *are out now on World Serpent*

[illegible] osite: scenes from The I Contact [illegible] y's production of Roger Doyle's [illegible] *Architecture*, Dublin, 1991

PHOTO OF ROGER DOYLE: COLM HENRY

ragas against the machine

The story of how flautist **Hariprasad Chaurasia** gave up a brilliant career as a professional wrestler to take on India's rigid classical music establishment
Words: Clive Bell. Photography: Michele Turriani

Against the background of a Swiss valley straight off the lid of a chocolate box, a couple stare into each other's eyes She breaks into song, he replies, and together they scamper across the Swiss valley grass Nowhere do actors scamper quite so much as in Indian movies Cut to a second film clip — another actor, another dodgy haircut. This time he's on his knees in the snow outside a ski lodge, utterly distraught. A feminine hand enters the frame from the left and raises his head She breaks into song, they scamper across the snowy mountain, and a subtitle glides across the screen *"Platinum selling soundtrack album"*

These clips illustrate an item on BBC2's *Network East* Saturday morning magazine programme, and now we go back to the studio to see the two composers responsible for these torrid, scampering pop songs that sell in their millions, Shivkumar Sharma and Hariprasad Chaurasia, together known as the dream team of Shiv-Hari Sharma and Chaurasia also happen to be [illegible] in Indian classical music, on santoor (zither) and bansuri (fl[illegible]y

In the West we talk a lot about breaking down barriers between musically fenced-off areas, but what do we know? It's hard to grasp that Hariprasad Chaurasia is both the leading classical player on the flute — which of course makes him one of the top improvising musicians anywhere — and the pop-composer of platinum selling film soundtracks Does this make him James Galway, Eric Dolphy and Burt Bacharach all rolled into one Grand Panjandrum?

Hariprasad Chaurasia is now a fit, weather-beaten 59 year old with mischievous eyes, who looks extremely comfortable inside his own body Talking to him, it's clear that he has reached the pinnacle of his profession through sheer hard work and bloody-minded determination To get there he inevitably got caught up in a struggle

against the more conservative elements of the Indian classical music world. During this century, all forms of classical music East and West have had to grapple with the charge of elitism. Is it possible to broaden a classical audience beyond a privileged and often elderly class of people, while retaining a vigorous, developing tradition, but without sacrificing the refinement that made the form worthwhile in the first place? It's debatable how well Western composers have scored on this test, but on the evidence of Chaurasia's regular genre crossings, be they solo or with Shiv-Hari, Indian music [illegible]es seem to be upbeat.

S[illegible] are conducting a press conference in London in advance of a big duo [illegible] at the Royal Festival Hall. "In the old days, children were not allowed to sing [illegible] this music," explains Hariprasad Chaurasia. "Now, if you go to villages in India [illegible]ay find young children sleeping on their mothers' laps, and they are enjoying music." Shivkumar Sharma adds: "50 years ago we could hardly find a young face in the audience. The average was beyond 40, and college students were not there. Now younger people are coming to concerts, and this is a very big change."

When Sharma and Chaurasia started to make inroads into the Indian classical world, the music was regarded as exclusively for the cultured and moneyed classes. In addtion, the culture imposed its own rigid caste system on instrumentation: certain instruments such as the sarod and sitar were in, while others were out. Shiv-Hari's santoor and flute were most definitely out. Both players were allied by a need to demonstrate that their instruments could play classical music on a level deeper than decoration, and both made modifications to their instruments to extend their musical range. Both spent years mastering new techniques, to enable the instruments to sustain the demanding task of performing 60 minute classical improvisations in front

of a highly alert and informed audience "I am trying to sing through the bamboo," says Chaurasia "And Shivkumar is the only person who can sing on the santoor"

In 1967, when he was 29, Chaurasia made a record which, with hindsight, looks like a revolutionary manifesto *Call Of The Volley* was a cycle of short ragas and composed melodies, based on a simple story of a day in a Kashmiri valley, from dawn to dusk. boy shepherd meets girl, they rendezvous at a temple, and take out a boat on the lake in the moonlight. Instead of lengthy unwindings, the ragas are presented in six minute chunks And if that didn't break enough taboos, they are played by flute, santoor and guitar, three instruments with no right to be playing ragas at all This was a reworking of Indian music entirely on Indian terms, a statement of intent from a younger generation of musicians It was not particularly aimed at the West — if aimed at anyone, it was the audience outside the Indian musical establishment. "We wanted to simplify the whole structure of the music," Chaurasia recalls "Before this the old masters were so complicated Sometimes they would deliberately confuse the tabla player, to show how great they were But my friends and I wanted to simplify it so that even children can understand It doesn't matter whether they understand the grammar or not, but they understand a good sound and a good feeling"

Unexpectedly, *Call Of The Volley* was a massive hit, going on to become the bestselling album ever of Indian music. In 1994 it was still receiving the ultimate accolade, turning up in CD counterfeiting raids in Britain For music lovers all over the world (Chaurasia often uses the term music lovers) it opened a window on Indian classical music But in 1967 Chaurasia was just happy to get a foot in the door of a recording studio "It was nothing, it was just that we were all free at that time We used to eat together, watch sports, sit and talk. Then we decided to do something together There was just one record company, His Master's Voice, and they never wanted to record us as soloists When they heard there were three of us, someone came from the office and said OK, let me see, if you sound all right we'll let you do it The producer, GN Joshi, was bound by the company only to record commercial music, which sold like hot cakes, and not classical music But he was a classical singer He was the only person who was sympathetic to us He said No, we can't record you solo or our company will die! And they never imagined this would become one of the top records"

> **"We wanted to simplify the whole structure of the music. Before this the old masters were so complicated. Sometimes they would deliberately confuse the tabla player to show how great they were"**

Remastered onto CD in 1995, *Call Of The Volley* has lost none of its charm The final track is "Rag Pahadi", and features a little dipping phrase passed around from guitar to flute, while the santoor plays a delicate melody and the tabla gently outlines a seven beat pattern The sleevenotes refer to it as "an Indian *Moonlight Sonata*", and for simple beauty it's hard to beat. The extraordinary sound of Brijbushan Kabra's acoustic guitar makes a key contribution to the album Chaurasia tells me that Kabra has recently started playing again after illness forced him into a long retirement.

I interviewed Chaurasia inside Holland's Rotterdam Conservatorium, where he spends several months of the year teaching Officially the music school was closed for the Dutch 'autumn holiday', but pianos and trombones practised busily in the background, creating a very European ambience as we sat on a thick crimson Indian carpet up on the top floor, and tried to think ourselves back to the India of the 1940s I wanted to ask about an earlier struggle in Chaurasia's life, a quite literal struggle, in fact, with his father, who was a professional wrestler

Chaurasia was born in 1938 in Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, a province where 90 per cent of the population wrestled as a hobby "This is the only sport they like, in small cities especially," he explains "My father and forefathers were all wrestlers, and my father wanted me to become one Sometimes I think I was fortunate to have such a father, that's how I got so much power You need terrific stamina to blow the flute If you play guitar you can play for eight hours, you are not blowing from inside But if you play the flute for one hour you will be exhausted

"You will find most famous musicians in India come from a family of musicians," he continues "People used to think about me Oh, he's playing as a hobby, he comes from a wrestler's family, he can't play music If I went to someone's concert, they used to ignore me But I never felt uncertain — that gave me more courage, a more jealous feeling, a passion to practise more and show them that I can also become a musician I wanted to break this tradition, that you must come from a musical background"

"When I was ten or 11, I became a professional wrestler I was a child prodigy! I never liked wrestling, but my father was very proud of me He used to feed me very nicely Oh son, take this milk, take this butter, eat it all up He used to like music, but he never wanted me to take up music, because musicians were not well-to-do it was not a secure life But I liked music so much I used to lie to my father, saying that I was going to the library to read a newspaper, but in fact I was listening to someone play I used to hide myself in the house of a musical family I said Can you give me shelter for a few hours? Yes, why not? Don't tell my father! Oh, I know, your father will start hitting you They treated me like their child, and I practised with a drummer, another young boy But my father never knew

"Once I was whistling — he came suddenly and said Who was whistling? I was alone there I said. I don't know No, you were whistling I said Yes, I was Then he started hitting me And he was a wrestler, so he could do it properly! You were whistling, you want to take up music! Unfortunately I lost my mother when I was five, so there was nobody to come between us Now I enjoy remembering those days, but at the time I was shocked"

I ask Chaurasia whether there was ever any music at the wrestling bouts "No, only shouting!" he replies, and roars in full-throated imitation of the crowd at a wrestling match "It used to give us inspiration, just like the audience for a concert." He switches to imitating the sighs and murmurs of approval clearly audible from Indian music audiences

After three or four years' surreptitious practice of vocal music, the young Chaurasia decided his voice had too narrow a range Then, at the age of 11, he heard a flute recital on the radio Won over by the sound, he resolved to take up the flute, and with impressive determination for an 11 year old, set about finding the player, Pandit Bholanath

"I went to the radio and enquired Then I went to his house and explained my problems," says Chaurasia "He said Never mind, I've heard about you, you sing very tunefully in school So I will accept you In fact I liked his sound more than his music I learnt the basic things from him, how to move your fingers, how to handle the instrument, and how to make it. Making your flute is a serious problem! There is no factory for this instrument. My fingers might be longer than yours, I may blow hard and you blow soft You have to make the flute according to the way you blow When I was 11 I played a smaller flute, but the teacher used to suggest. Why don't you take a bigger one, and slowly your fingers will stretch See my fingers"

Chaurasia displays his hands for inspection He plays a large, deep-toned flute, and the finger holes are covered with the middle of the fingers, not the tips A brief encounter with the instrument makes it clear that a lot of painful and unnatural stretching is involved Chaurasia's hands are very large and the fingers are definitely angled in the middle Bananas come to mind

One of the ways Chaurasia adapted the flute for classical music was to play a bigger instrument. So does a low pitched instrument somehow denote musical seriousness?

"The flute should be as low as possible, especially for the traditional druphad style," he says "Small flutes are used of course in commercial music and for special effects in films I play small flutes in the concert hall, too, but you can't listen to that kind of flute for half an hour A small flute can be very difficult to play because the fingers are so close together, especially when we are fingering the microtones We use 22 microtones in one octave In North India we like this deep sound, but in the south they

use high flutes, because their temperament and their musical system is very different. Also South Indian music is mainly rhythm based, there's no alap [the non-rhythmic introduction to a raga], the rhythm starts straight away and the whole raga may only last seven minutes. Here in the north, rhythm is only one element. In a 50 minute raga performance, the alap may last 35 minutes before the rhythm starts."

When the teenage Chaurasia left school he left behind the wrestling world, but kept his father happy by landing a government job as a typist with Pitmans shorthand. He kept this highly respectable position for five years, while moonlighting at the local radio as an occasional flute player. Then, to Chaurasia's immense relief, the radio offered him a full time job, 1000 miles away in a remote city called Orissa. For his father, this was a triple whammy. His son was leaving home, he was unaware that his boy could even play the flute, and most astonishingly, the salary was double what Chaurasia had been making as a typist. Little wonder his father burst into tears when he heard the news.

At last a full time musician, Chaurasia threw himself into learning music, sending all his radio salary to his father and supporting himself by accompanying dancers. In this remote spot his only teacher was the record library at the radio station. Eventually his reputation as a dance musician became such that he was earning ten times the radio salary, and incurring the wrath of his jealous radio colleagues, who reported him to the authorities as a slacker. The punishment was a transfer to another radio job, but this time in Bombay, the centre of the Indian film industry. At first friendless, nervous and unknown in the city, Chaurasia laughs as he explains how within a month he was in such demand for film music that he was raking in 20 times what he had earned in Orissa. Again the radio management was disapproving. "This time I said: Before you throw me out, I will throw you out!"

Resigning from the radio, Chaurasia worked full time in Bombay's film music industry, and fame and material success followed. Now with a house, a car and savings in the bank, he hit a musical crisis. "I was thinking: What have I really achieved? What if I died today? I have fulfilled the needs of my ego, now I must learn properly from a teacher how to make music beautiful. I must play classical music, it has such a wide field compared with commercial music."

At this point, Chaurasia thought back to a childhood meeting with Ustad Allaudin Khan, the elderly sitarist and one of the true giants of Indian music this century. He was Ravi Shankar's teacher and father-in-law. Khan had recognised considerable talent in the young Chaurasia, but also knew about Chaurasia senior's violent feelings on the subject. "If you ever want to develop your talent in the future," he told the boy, "I may not be alive much longer, so go to my daughter." This daughter was Annapurna Devi who played the massive surbahar, a cello to the sitar's viola. On marrying Ravi Shankar she had given up performing, but Chaurasia knew she was living in Bombay. He waited till Shankar was out of town and then visited Annapurna, begging her to accept him as a pupil. Shocked at this approach from someone she didn't know, and suspicious of his motives, Annapurna threw him out and refused to teach him. Indeed, she kept on refusing for three years. To the iron will of Chaurasia, this was one more challenge to overcome, but his persistence was to take an extraordinary form.

"After three or four years she said: If you are serious you will have to start again from the very beginning," he explains. "I turned the flute around, to hold it on my left side. I said: Look, now I cannot play a single note. This is my playing for you. And since then I play the flute on the left. This was to prove my complete surrender to music. What I wanted to learn from her was music. I wanted to break the tradition that if you learn the violin you go to a violinist, for the flute you go to a flute player. Whether you play the cello or not, if you think that [renowned cellist] Yo Yo Ma plays beautiful music, you should go to him. And since then I have been learning from her. She is so wonderful, so much patience."

As a flute player myself, I say, I can imagine all too vividly the sheer pain that would result from changing to lefthanded playing. I compare it to Samuel Beckett suddenly forcing himself to write in French. "And you get so much power from this!" Chaurasia replies. "Like a murderer — he is a human being like me, but he has a special power." I find myself temporarily silenced by this comparison.

In 1995 Sharma and Chaurasia recorded a duo concert in Bombay. Titling it *The Valley Recalls*, it became their belated double CD follow up to 1967's *Call Of The Valley*. A few days after our interview, the duo played their first London concert for 30 years. At the press conference Sharma explained how they had deliberately avoided playing duets all that time, in order to prove beyond question that these two instruments could succeed in the ultimate arena: solo instrumental music. Critics had grudgingly agreed that the flute and santoor were acceptable when played together, implying a lower level of achievement, and Shiv-Hari set out to prove them wrong.

Chaurasia has also recorded with several Western musicians, notably on the ECM label's 1987 release *Making Music*, another massive seller, with guitarist John McLaughlin, saxophonist Jan Garbarek and Zakir Hussain on tablas. Chaurasia stresses the pleasure he gets from these cross-cultural exchanges, but it's clear that such projects are a side issue for him, and that he remains totally dedicated to his solo playing career. Today, this involves an alarmingly hectic schedule of international flights, but Chaurasia says he loves every minute. His iron determination seems to have resulted in complete musical fulfilment.

Later in the day, students arrive for lessons with Pandit Chaurasia. They come from all over Europe: Norway, Germany and England, as well as Holland, and an Afghan student of Indian singing, who talks to the teacher in Urdu. It's fascinating to see the Indian technique broken down into bite-sized chunks, especially when Chaurasia demonstrates the rhythmic force of his percussive tonguing, flicking out a syncopated phrase like David Ginola backheeling a pass into the penalty area.

One Dutch woman comes for a first lesson, with three bamboo flutes she picked up on holiday in India. The situation strikes me as slightly absurd, given Chaurasia's status. It's as if I picked up a beaten-up cello in a car boot sale, and went off to see Yo Yo Ma for a lesson or two. But Chaurasia is clearly delighted that she's here at all, and is perfectly happy to go back to first principles, pointing out fundamental differences between East and West in playing scales and naming notes. "Are there any books of music?" asks the student. "Only for children," says Chaurasia, and launches into a very Indian version of "Jingle Bells". "You have to slide your fingers between every note, you have to move your body." Indeed, every phrase he plays is expressed in his head movements and the whole upper half of the body. This is part of the delight of watching Hariprasad Chaurasia — not only is he an exquisite player, he's also a complete showman, with a highly physical and muscular approach to music belied by the delicacy of his phrasing. The eyes flash, the head shakes, the upper body dances, and perhaps in his head the crowd roars — just as it did for the ten year old wrestler five decades ago. □ Call Of The Valley *has been reissued by EMI Hemisphere.* The Valley Recalls Vols 1 & 2, *as well as various live concert recordings, are available on Navras Records (Tel: 01604 490682). Many of Hariprasad Chaurasia's studio recordings are available on Nimbus Records (Tel: 01600 890682).*

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In the latest reel of his **secret history of film music**, Philip Brophy traces the rise of black consciousness in American movies, from Quincy Jones's jazz sophistication to the full-on wah-wah funk of 70s blaxploitation flicks

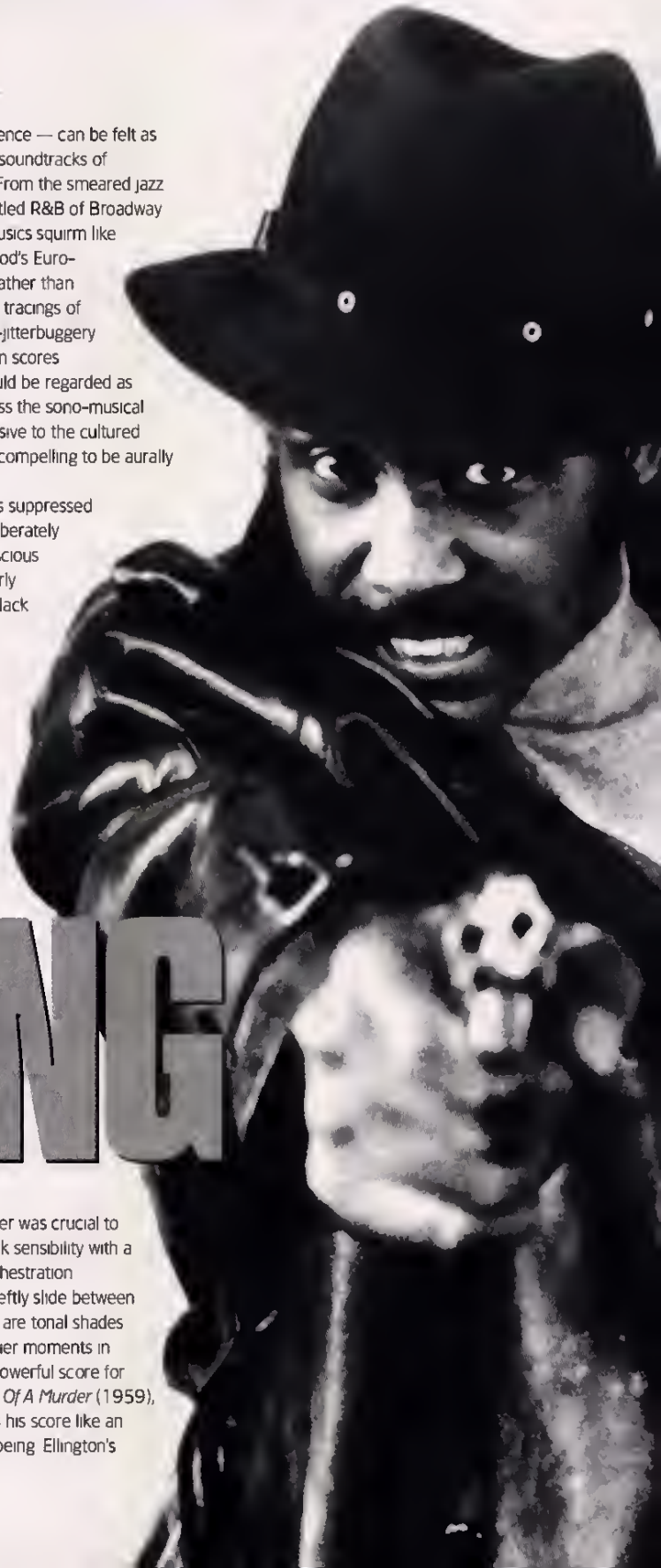
SHAFTING

The isolation and segregation of 'race music' in America through the first half of this century has to a large degree been retrospectively erased and stitched together by the CD reissue industry From Andre Williams to Sun Ra, John Coltrane to Blow Fly, Roland Kirk to Bohannon, we now have an endless supply of high resolution bitmapped musical documents which grant responsive ears the luxury of repeated listening to get closer to the outer most satellites of the black planet. Yet what of blackness on the movie soundtrack? The recouping of a black sensibility in the cinema has been and remains far more difficult.

Historically, American cinema can be viewed as the mutant offspring of the recording industry, genetically created by cross-fertilising music publishing with motion picture technologies The mutation effect occurs as a consequence of the way in which cinema had attained a monstrous degree of normalisation by the 20s, generating populist mythologies faster then the pacing of its pop fiction The visual became monstrous Pop tunes from the Tin Pan Alley era could become infectious and whistled across America, but the audio-visual burn of fusing music with images in so-called silent movies left many psycho-social scars Anonymous yet broadly interpreted songs were tyrannised by image codes and socially acceptable standards — of what could be depicted and what was deemed unsuitable for exhibition or documentation The result was the emergance of a visual homogeneity, thickened by successive layers of conventions, icons and cliches Racial, ethnic and regional differences, which musically could thrive as characteristic stylings, were either rendered absurd or were harshly suppressed when images had to be tracked to the recordings Where the sound of blackness enjoyed a pervasive presence through its invisibility as music, it consequently paled on the white screen — and would continue to do so for many decades to come

Yet blackness — as much a virulent, adaptable amoeba as a clear, potent essence — can be felt as muted subsonic waves on the soundtracks of Hollywood's classical cinema From the smeared jazz of gangster movies to the mottled R&B of Broadway musicals, African-American musics squirm like dancing insects under Hollywood's Euro-Caucasian blanket of fiction Rather than being dismissed as inauthentic tracings of 'true' black music, the pseudo-jitterbuggery which peppered Hollywood film scores through the 30s and 40s should be regarded as Hollywood's inability to suppress the sono-musical swell that is black music offensive to the cultured tastebuds of the time, yet too compelling to be aurally absented

Blackness first oozes from its suppressed depths through the cracks deliberately engineered in the socially conscious cinema of the late 50s and early 60s Reflecting a developing black consciousness that equally affected black and white America, Quincy Jones's score for Sydney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* (1965) represents the first dark drops of what would eventually become a gushing sea of shiny, funky oil. Jones's background as an arranger and studio producer was crucial to his combining of an urban black sensibility with a studied European mode of orchestration Moments in *The Pawnbroker* deftly slide between these two poles Though there are tonal shades highly reminiscent of the brassier moments in Duke Ellington's breathy and powerful score for Otto Preminger's *An Anatomy Of A Murder* (1959), Jones composes and conducts his score like an unwelcome alien, an ill-fitting being Ellington's



soundtrack is a seamlessly woven R&B/jazz text which wholly embodies the film's narrative. Jones's score — like a Jew in Spanish Harlem (*à la* Rod Steiger's character) or a black on the Hollywood soundtrack — declares its displacement clearly. The main title's use of vibes, celeste, harpsichord and harp tantalisingly casts semi-jazz clusters against a monophonic semi-blues line played by thickened strings. It's like hearing Ellington and George Gershwin simultaneously. It's black and jazz and all the space in between.

In another sense, it is also 'funky' — a heady brew of extreme contrasts and polyglot textures which celebrates a sense of Otherness. Throughout *The Pawnbroker*, the American melting pot sweats and breathes. Latin percussion, soul-jazz alto sax solos, bebop double basslines, freestyle drum kit bursts, atonal organ lines — all played by players of Jones's choice — capture the mulatto melodiousness of the real and mythical New York street. No aural homogenisation is apparent: multiple instrumental voices are allowed their distinctive presence in the arrangement and the mix.

Along with *The Pawnbroker*, Jones's scores for *Mirage* (1965), *The Slender Thread* (1966), *In Cold Blood* and *In The Heat Of The Night* (both 1967) form a cluster which typifies the emerging 'sound of the city' as a brash, harsh, violent urban environment where racial and/or criminal tension is stretched tight. Strains, glimmers and blasts of soul, R&B, blues, jazz and funk are blended into a beautiful African-American sonorum which marks Jones as a key figure in wrenching the film score from its Wagnerian cave and slamming it down in the midst of crosstown traffic. And just in case you can't hear that process in action on the soundtracks, listen to Jones's inimitable theme for the first hip 'street crime' TV show, *Ironside* (1967), complete with synth and squealing trumpets that would be copied for numerous cop show TV themes and film scores throughout the 70s.

Quincy Jones

Did someone mention the 70s? Try 1971's Academy Award for Best Theme Song — Isaac Hayes for *Shaft* (1971, directed by Gordon Parks). Some may find it hard to listen to this soundtrack without also hearing all the subsequent retro-revisionist parodies based on the iconography it so perfectly stylised. Try it, anyway: you'll hear that it embodies many of the urban traits which Jones had developed throughout the 60s.

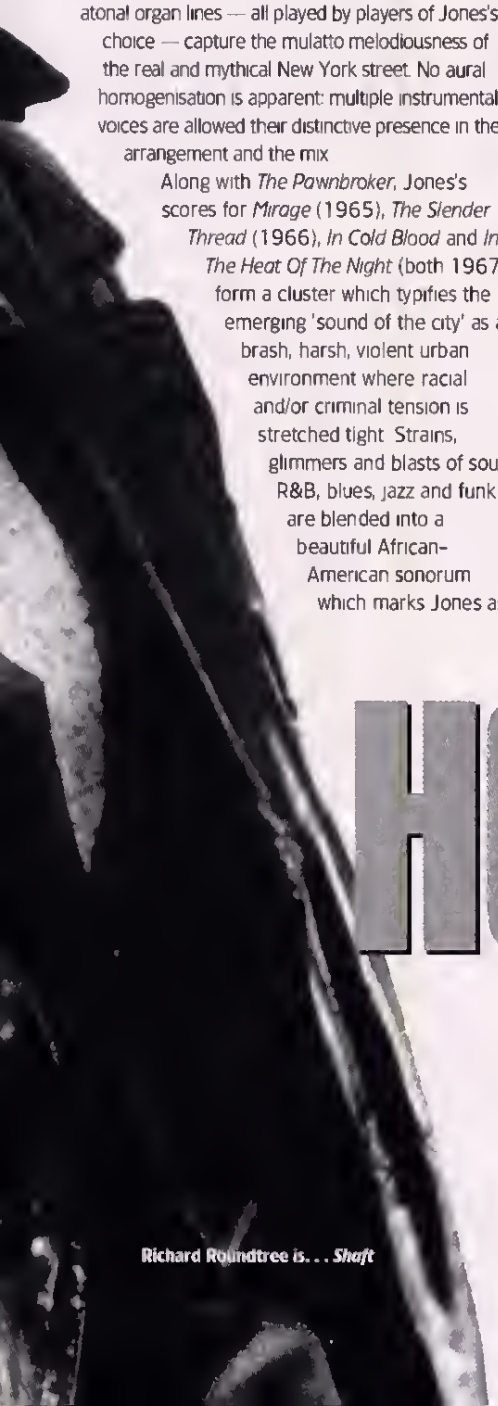
Before *Shaft*, Hayes had himself enjoyed an impressive career as an arranger, producer and composer, and his Southern soul sensibilities are articulated with care and ease in the many moods and colours encapsulated by the ornate sectioning of the main theme, as it rolls along on its wah-wah-driven wicky-wacky rhythm.

The flutes, trombones, hi-hats, guitars and piano of *Shaft* crop up in the explosive sound of the black city that is the Blaxploitation movie: a rapaciously anti-white world imaged by and predicated on a black experience of the collapsed metropolis which no Mr-Brady-in-a-frizz-hairdo could architecturally set right.

Unlike film *noir*, with its tense, monochrome interiors, the domain of Blaxploitation is brightly lit, loudly coloured, sharply focused and garishly situated. Clothes are vulgar, dialogue is grotesque, comedy is offensive, sex is delicious, speed is noisy, guns are desirable, drugs are food, money is oxygen. And the music is so black, so funky, so potent that it is hard to find a more aggressive period in the history of film scores. This is not a groundbreaking view: listen to rap music from the last 15 years and it is painfully apparent that HipHop is an urban musical culture projected through the dark prism of Blaxploitation in all its defiant irresponsibility. The excesses in the audio-visual carnivals of Blaxploitation movies are a jubilant celebration of image being returned to sound — imagery that Hollywood had commenced suppressing in the 20s. Blaxploitation movies carry the intensity of blackness in high detail and sharp relief, shining like ebony under arc lights, ignited by the chants of "Burn, Hollywood, Burn!"

Between 1971-77 around 115 Blaxploitation films were produced. The scores are too numerous to list in full, but it is worth noting that key soul and funk artists threw their grooves into the melting pot after the explosive success of *Shaft* and its sequels: Quincy Jones (*Honky*, 1972), James Brown (*Black Caesar*, 1972, and *Hell Up In Harlem*, 1973), Curtis Mayfield (*Superfly*, 1972), Solomon Burke (*Cool Breeze*, 1972), Marvin Gaye (*Trouble Man*, 1972), Bobby Womack (*Across 110th Street*, 1972), The Impressions (*Three The Hard Way*, 1973), Osibisa (*Superfly TNT*, 1973), Isaac Hayes again (*Truck Turner* and *Tough Guys*, both 1974), Willie Hutch (*Foxy Brown*, 1974). Screaming fuzz-wahs on every instrument and killer beats all over the place — by the middle of the 70s the action film soundtrack had been recolonised by a deafening blackness that could only be ignored through prejudice. ☐ *Coming next month: Spike Lee and new school Blaxploitation movies*

HOLLYWOOD


Richard Roundtree is... *Shaft*

the primer

An occasional series in which we offer a neophyte's guide to the must-have recordings of some of the names we like to drop a lot. This month, Biba Kopf takes a trip with **The Grateful Dead**. Illustration: Savage Pencil

They were a freak occurrence, that's for sure. Indeed, in any time or place other than 60s San Francisco they would never have been allowed to happen. When else could a Hell's Angel lookalike blues singer, whose slob habits earned him the nickname Pigpen, fall in with an itinerant jugband banjo player with one finger missing, a former pupil of Luciano Berio whose haughty high seriousness would never leave him, and a well-to-do All-American pretty boy from the right side of the tracks?

Seeing The Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* triggered an electric change in Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, who mutated first into The Warlocks and then The Grateful Dead. They cut their teeth as the houseband for Ken Kesey's 1965-66 acid tests, and fell in with acid manufacturer and counterculture high priest Owsley Stanley, whose other abiding passion was designing and upgrading the group's sound systems to cope with its ever-expanding, amorphous, electronic blues.

More so than their closest contemporaries — Jefferson Airplane and Quicksilver Messenger Service — The Dead defined the sound of San Francisco psychedelia. Theirs was an acidmelt of American musics, from soul, blues and R&B to Country, bluegrass and rock 'n' roll, cranked through mercilessly high volume into the most physically ravishing rock. And because music was always uppermost in their minds, regardless of their appetite for chemicals, they sought to do with and to music what acid did to them: rip it open, travel through it — the farthest reaches of the drug experience.

For Jerry Garcia, the banjo player with the missing finger who went on to become America's most insatiable musician and guitarist, that meant exploring the tonalities and totalities of volume and feedback. For bassist Phil Lesh, it meant playing between the beats and cutting the group's psychedelics with avant garde tricks learned under Berio, for drummers Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart it was about pushing the beat and diverting it downriver towards the heart of darkness, for pretty boy Bob Weir and Ron Pigpen McKernan it was as much about trying to keep up, supplying guitar and keyboard accompaniments that added more conventional Country, rock and blues stylings to the mix.

It should have been a mess, and frequently was, but when they were *on* The Dead shone colder and brighter than anyone else. In truth, they were most alive for a three year period in the late 60s, when their Dark Star went supernova and imploded. Yet its brilliant white light continued to illuminate their way right up until Garcia's death, of a heart attack, in 1995. In addition, they never quite cracked the art of recording — as a group they had practically given up making studio albums by the end of the 70s — but live they never stopped trying to reconfigure the intensity of their earliest musics in songs that addressed the American experience in a travelling carney meld of US idioms and voices. By the late 80s they had become one of America's biggest grossing concert attractions, and in the process had become, somewhat bizarrely, alternative icons for younger generations of Americans seeking in a Dead concert an escape from the dull conformity of the age.

What a long strange trip it's been, and for anyone joining it via their record releases, it is only now becoming

clear just how truly weird it was In recent years, the group has launched two live archive series, *Dick's Picks* and *From The Vaults*, as well as several unaffiliated concert releases, all through their Grateful Dead label The travelling might be over, but the trip goes on

Fallout From The Phil Zone

(Grateful Dead GDCD4052 2CD)

The Dead's early phase as an R&B and folk/blues covers group is poorly documented Granted, their 1967 debut album *The Grateful Dead* contains standards such as Sonny Boy Williamson's "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" and the more obscure "Viola Lee Blues", but these punked-up amphetamined versions hardly sound like the group at all even at this stage, the songs had become launchpads for their extended dancehall improvisations Five outstanding tracks on *Fallout From The Phil Zone*, a collection of previously unreleased live recordings from 1967-95, capture the group in transition from ballroom songsters to fullblown acid-phreakers During a version of "Viola Lee", recorded in Chicago in 1969, the song's borders gradually dissolve in the mantric repetition of its slightly foreshortened 11 and a half bar motif Drummers Hart and Kreutzmann seem to be simultaneously propelling the song forward and pulling it back from the brink, leaving Garcia free to negotiate the vertiginous rhythmic swirl The track peaks with a monumental fall-of-Rome noise thrash that anticipates Sonic Youth by some 15 years

Anthem Of The Sun

(Warner Bros WS1749 CD)

Aoxomoxoa

(Warner Bros WS1790 CD)

If Dead energy was impossible to capture in the studio, then the solution was typically extreme — go the other way and substitute live fire with an experimental fervour for electronics, tapes and *concrète* collage Garcia encouraged Phil Lesh to indulge his knowledge of 20th century composition to extend The Dead's reach into the subconscious of the song But in the beginning their experiments were hampered by the presence of a Warner Brothers stooge, producer Dave Hassinger, who was drafted in to oversee the 1968 *Anthem Of The Sun* sessions He eventually quit when guitarist Bob Weir asked for more "heavy air" in the mix Left to their own devices, the group brought in Lesh's fellow music student, the avantish keyboards player Tom Constanten, and under his guidance they cut the songs' organic flow with prepared piano sounds and electronic tape elements On "That's It For The Other One", they overlaid a number of live recordings of the song and studio-treated them to create a heavily impacted simulation of an acid hit Well, it's not exactly the same thing, but it is a fine example of 60s psychedelia's affinity with the avant garde

Aoxomoxoa dispenses with the live elements altogether for all-out studio experiment, albeit within relatively tight songforms With Constanten now a fulltime member, Pigpen's blues-influenced keyboards have been shunted to one side Consequently, *Aoxomoxoa* is far less physical than most 60s Dead, particularly the harpsichord ballad "Mountains Of The Moon", the phased vocal and prepared piano nightmare of "What's Become Of The Baby", and the bowdlerised studio version of the wonderful Dead standard "St Stephen"

Although *Aoxomoxoa* marks the end of The Dead's shortlived *ensemble moderne* phase, Garcia would later feature electronics heavily on his debut solo album *Garcia*, and Lesh would produce Ned Lagin's electroacoustic *Seastones*, as well as instigate The Rex Foundation, which used Dead money to fund new works by hardcore avant composers, including UK New Complexity pioneer Michael Finnissy

Live/Dead

(Warner Bros WS1830 CD)

Fillmore East 2-11-69

(Grateful Dead GDCD4054 2CD)

The Dead's studio experiments were a costly business that left them with a pair of poor selling albums and a massive debt to Warner Brothers Under such circumstances they managed to persuade the reluctant company to release *Live/Dead*, the live double album that not only defined the West Coast 60s psychedelic experiment better than any other, but also went on to sell well enough to clear their debts Montaged from a set of 1969 San Francisco concerts, the intention was to present as near perfect a representation of a Dead performance as it was possible to get It segues together an ideal Deadset — or at least the closing 70 minute passage from one even then their concerts

could break the three hour mark — the seven songs of which allow ample space for improvising The 23 minute version of "Dark Star" is the best available 'official' version of the group's greatest song — there are around half a dozen versions orbiting the Deadzone — for the way it opens up the inner space of an acid trip into the outer space of the song The level of intuition guiding the group's jams on this recording is astonishing, as "Dark Star" metamorphoses into "St Stephen" and "The Eleven" From there to the slack-jawed, slavering innuendo of Pigpen's partypiece "Turn On Your Lovelight" is some leap But the slob angel redeems himself with the organ parts he contributes to Garcia's emotionally devastating version of The Rev Gary Davis's "Death Don't Have No Mercy"

In late 69, The Dead were booked to support Janis Joplin for two concerts at New York's Fillmore East. Only allowed an hour for each set, their song extensions are out of necessity more disciplined, yet they still open up an extraordinary sense of space on the "Dark Star"/"St Stephen"/"The Eleven" sequence

History Of The Grateful Dead Vol 1 (Bear's Choice)

(Warner Bros BS2721 CD)

Dick's Picks Vol Four: Fillmore East February 13-14/70

(Grateful Dead GDCD34023 3CD)

Taken together, these two collections, recorded during two Valentine's Day concerts in 1970 by Acidmeister Owsley 'Bear' Stanley, are about as close as you can get to a complete Grateful Dead marathon on disc Stanley programmed the 1973 release *Bear's Choice* as a partial tribute to Pigpen (leading solid, if hardly inspired workouts on "Katie Mae", Otis Redding's "Hard To Handle" and "Smokestack Lightnin"), who had died earlier in the year of liver failure aged 27, becoming the first of three Dead keyboards players to die young. The disc's one original, "Black Peter", looked back to Garcia's jugband origins, and anticipated the Country/folk rock harmonies of the soon-to-be-released *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* The downside of this roots drift was that tighter Country-oriented rock didn't provide such good vehicles for the group's red-raw improvisations However, this early in the transition, there are still plenty of take-off points The warts 'n' all approach of the *Dick's Picks* live archive series, curated by the group's tape archivist Dick Latvala and now up to volume nine, means you get the longueurs alongside the highlights, but it also means you can better appreciate the dynamic shifts that defined a Dead concert The fourth volume in the series covers a lot of ground early airings for *Workingman's Dead* songs like "Casey Jones" and "Dire Wolf", an astonishingly pretty take of "China Cat Sunflower" (from *Aoxomoxoa*), and a 90 minute deep space plunge through "Dark Star", "That's It For The Other One" and "Turn On Your Lovelight"

Workingman's Dead

(Warner Bros WS1869 CD)

American Beauty

(Warner Bros WS1893 CD)

By definition, utopia is always a dream away When The Rolling Stones tried to buy into the already extinct Haight-Ashbury dream by hosting a free concert at Altamont in the winter of 1969, San Francisco's finest — Jefferson Airplane, The Dead — were drafted in as support acts, and the local chapter of the Hell's Angels acted as security By the time it was over, the Angels had KOed Airplane singer Marty Balin and killed a member of the audience The Dead slunk off without playing, and given their own uneasy relationship with the Angels, began to rethink their own dream-utopia

These two 1970 albums were the result In place of extended sonic explorations of acid, electricity and feedback, The Dead offered a return to the eternal verities of campfire song, largely played acoustically, the group's wayward, stacked harmonies a living metaphor for people triumphing over individual limitations by forging an overriding sense of community The songs' rediscovery of a simpler, more mythic America struck a chord with the hippy legions experiencing the comedown that was the end of the 60s, and the albums easily outsold their predecessors

Hundred Year Hall

(Grateful Dead GDCD4021 2CD)

By 1972, Dead avantist Tom Constanten was long gone and drummer Mickey Hart had also temporarily left the group, embarrassed by his manager father's embezzling of group funds In addition, Pigpen was too ill to contribute much They were replaced by Keith and Donna Godcheaux, on keyboards and vocals respectively The former's contributions both helped stabilise and lubricate the group's rhythm machine, which would miss Hart's extra bass drum kick and percussive invention until he rejoined in 1975 But Donna's vocals were never up to much, as *Hundred Year Hall*, taped in Frankfurt in 1972, clearly demonstrate Even though you have to suffer her harmonies, this set is infinitely preferable to the Warners triple album *Europe 1972* Pity, because the range of songs featured on the latter established The Dead as rivals to The Band in their evocation of vagabond Americana, always on the move, the nation's unrest mirrored in both the continental drift of the material and the characters portrayed But the *Europe 72* tapes were fudged in the studio, leaving little real live material On *Hundred Year Hall*, however, the group exhibited a lightness of touch that let them speed seamlessly through a set of newish songs and Dead staples, culminating in the exhilarating, trancelike 54 minute cosmic highway segue of "Truckin'" and "Cryptical Envelopment"

Wake Of The Flood

(Grateful Dead GDCD4002 CD)

Blues For Allah

(Grateful Dead GDCD4001 CD)

In 1973 The Grateful Dead attempted to make their dream utopia real by setting up their own record label It was a noble ideal, but from the outset they were beset by problems, particularly those which sprang from their profound lack of interest in business matters. Most damaging, financially speaking, was the counterfeiting of the new label's launch album, *Wake Of The Flood* (1973), which made a heavy dent in their East Coast sales By the time of *Blues For Allah* (1975), the label's finances were stretched to breaking point by the cost of keeping the burgeoning Dead operation going. Eventually they were forced to close down and sign on with Arista

The positive side of their shortlived independence was the renewed interest in stretching the boundaries of the song *Wake Of The Flood* established the pace of Dead music to come — slow and muddy like the river they celebrate in the excellent "Mississippi Half-Step Uptown Toodleoo", one of many Dead songs to emerge from the songwriting team of Garcia and lyricist Robert Hunter These songs ooze across the American landmass, taking their shape and subject matter from the musics, people and places they swallow up along the way

Their punishing touring schedule was by now beginning to take its toll The 1974 album *From The Mars Hotel* was too rushed, its pinched production values doing scant justice to some fine songs ("US Blues", "Unbroken Chain", "Ship Of Fools") The group took a year off, during which time they were rejoined by Mickey Hart They returned to record *Blues For Allah* at Hart's ranch studio, where they went to great lengths to establish the playful ambience conducive to the record's ambitions The mood carried through into the bizarre, jazzed ethno-forgenes which orbit the songs proper Likewise, their idea of Arabic music might have been somewhat skewed, but The Empty Quarter they conjured was vast enough for Garcia and the percussionists to trace endlessly fascinating patterns of abstraction Although 20 years old, *Blues For Allah* is The Dead's last totally successful studio album

Reckoning

(Arista BS23 CD)

The Dead ended up spending most of their recording lives on Arista, yet in all that time they failed to produce one wholly satisfactory studio record They still had the songs, though The Dead's various writing teams got slower and slower with the passing years, but a combination of record company pressure and their own loss of confidence after the collapse of their independent operation resulted in outside producers being brought in to 'polish' the sound on their first three Arista studio albums, *Terrapin Station*, *Shakedown Street* (both 1977) and *Go To Heaven* (1978), in the vain hope of bringing sales up to the level of their public and critical standing

Unsurprisingly, these producer-compromised releases

pleased no one, least of all the Deadheads, who abhorred the group's attempts to 'go disco' on *Terrapin Station*'s title track, a 16 minute 'suite' which included string arrangements by Paul Buckmaster. *Go To Heaven*, complete with an airbrushed and blowdried Dead cover portrait, sounded as horrible as it looked. Yet all the way through their Arista recordings there were good songs struggling to get out. "Shakedown Street" (from *Shakedown Street*), "Alabama Getaway" and "Althea" (from *Go To Heaven*) have all made the successful transition to their live repertoire.

After three frustrating albums, The Dead stayed studio shy for most of the next two decades. Why compromise themselves with idiot company men and commercial producers when they weren't selling that many records anyway? The Dead live was still a far more joyous experience, particularly when they got to play in intimate venues like New York's Radio City Music Hall in 1980. Documenting the acoustic half of the set, *Reckoning* focuses on the group's songwriting skills. It also reveals how good a song interpeter Garcia could be. He might have been one of the croakiest vocalists ever to front a major group, but when he was working at volume and pitch levels within his limits, he could be profoundly affecting, as on the versions of "China Doll" and "It Must Have Been The Roses".

In The Dark

(Arista 361145 CD)

Paradoxically, the worse their records got, the bigger a concert draw they became: by the end of the 80s The Grateful Dead were one of the biggest grossing live acts in America. But whatever satisfaction their success brought them was undermined by the added pressures of having to play massive arenas to meet the wage bills of The Dead organisation necessary to keep them on the road. They were acutely aware that they needed new songs, new challenges to prevent them lapsing into routine. Then there was also the small problem of Jerry Garcia's heroin addiction that isolated him from the rest of the group. A drug bust and subsequent period in rehab helped heal the rift, but Garcia would periodically go back to chasing the dragon pretty much up to his death in 1995. Before then, in 1986, Garcia had a near-death experience when he fell into a diabetic coma. After his recovery he had to completely relearn the guitar, and in the process he rediscovered his enthusiasm for playing Dead. Taking Garcia's reprieve as a new lease of life, the group finally overcame their studio shyness to record *In The Dark* (1987). By laying down the basic tracks live, they managed to capture some of the freeflowing qualities of their concert performances. The album also produced their first Top Ten hit, "Touch Of Grey", complete with its witty, MTV-friendly animated video. Unfortunately, they failed to sustain their renewed interest in the recording process for their last, tepid studio album, *Built To Last* (1989). A sad one to go out on, but no doubt the live discs will keep on coming.

Dozin' At The Knick

(Grateful Dead GDCD34024 3CD)

Hopefully, the *Dick's Picks* series will come up with better late-Dead live discs than this Dickless offering from 1990, for as their 1995 performance of Bob Dylan's "Visions Of Johanna" (on *Fallout From The Phil Zone* — see above) proves, 15 years of stadium rocking hadn't entirely blunted the group's sensitivity. Much of this 1990 concert is just OK in a cruising on automatic sort of way. The necessity to pace Garcia's vocal contributions means a wider democratic spread of singers and songs — a mixed blessing that — and more extensive 'drums/space' sections. The latter are the parts where Kreutzmann and Hart revive the group's Improv fervour by filling the hall with the kind of spooked percussion they contributed to the *Apocalypse Now* soundtrack, before the others drift in to plot a path through abstraction back to the song. However, the most inspired moments on this set occur when Garcia ripples seams of silvery guitar through Bob Weir's "Playing In The Band", illuminating and emotionally intensifying a Dead workhorse of a song that normally served as a relatively straight crowd pleaser. Moments like these are what keep Deadheads listening: just when they appear locked for all eternity in a comfortable Country-boogie shuffle, one of them is inspired to up the ante, and suddenly the whole group kicks in to raise the performance to an altogether higher level.

Infrared Roses

(Grateful Dead GDCD40132 CD)

Grayfolded

(Swell/Artifact 1969-1996 2CD)

Although not strictly Dead releases, these two CDs are welcome reminders of the group's commitment to the kind of mindfuck experimentation that launched them back in the 60s. *Infrared Roses* is engineer Bob Bralove's *musique concrète* album made up of improvised drum/space sections abstracted from various Dead concerts. Nice idea, but somehow the results are unsatisfying.

Grayfolded is something else. Granted access to the group's massive tape archive, John Oswald plunders samples from hundreds of performances of "Dark Star" to fashion an extraordinary trip to the coldest, blackest reaches of the ultimate Deadsong. Unbelievers can start here, and work their way back through Oswald's folds and flashbacks to the moment when the Deadstar first exploded into light, over a quarter of a century earlier. □ *Releases on the Grateful Dead label are distributed by Ace*

Dead on the couch

jukebox

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. This month it's the turn of. . .

Bootsy Collins

Tested by Ben Watson

THE SWANEE QUINTET

"Strong Determination" from *The Best Of The Swanee Quintet Vol 2* (Creed)

I'd say this was recorded at the end of the 60s. It's got some gospel in it — in fact, it *is* gospel! [Sings the guitar's 12 bar chord progression] I remember that, I think it's one of the first things I learned! [Laughs] Who is this? [I show him the cover] I remember these cats, I remember their names. I was going to say the drummer sounds like Jabo [Starks, The JBs' drummer]. I started out playing bass in gospel, a group called The Christianaires. We used to go around different places, we did a lot of stuff in Cincinnati, out of town, a travelling group, we had a record and everything. I never usually get back that far in interviews, I start with the clubs, because that's where my professional thing started off, but actually it was The Christianaires. I had some really great times. Even when I wasn't playing in the group, I'd go round different churches, go in and sit down and play. It was really cool — it got me into playing.

FELA RANSOME KUTI & NIGERIA 70

"My Lady Frustration" from *The 69 Los Angeles Sessions* (Stern's Africa)

Ah yeah! I like it! [As soon as singing starts] I know who this is — Fela Ransome! You know how I know? I went over there with James Brown. We went to Nigeria in 1970, and they were playing this. He had a club in Lagos, and we came to the club, and they were treating us like kings! We were telling *them* they're the funkiest cats we ever heard in our life, and they were replying, 'No, *you* cats are the ones!' They were on stage with the drummers, they were all so funky, man. I mean, this is the *James Brown band*, but we were totally wiped out! They don't even know how much, in so far as being amazed by their rhythm. It was all such a natural thing.

Did you know that they'd been in LA laying down these tracks the previous year?

We had no idea. Not at all.

Did Kuti invite Brown to Nigeria?

I know who sponsored the shows — Target Cigarettes — but I don't know who was behind the whole thing. They were fainting when we played. They were, like, losing it. I mean *we* was losing it when we heard these cats! If you listen to "Stretchin' Out", I kept that drum beat in my mind, and I did a version. I added my type of thing to it, but it was based off of this kind of groove. [He accompanies the music by clapping and stomping, instantly decoding the elaborate rhythmic cycle] You know what I'm saying, that kind of thing!

That's stretching out a bit from 4/4, isn't it?

Yeah! [Laughs] That stretches that sucker all the way, man! Once I heard it, I wanted to use it, so I just kept it in my mind, kept messing with the groove. I didn't know when I'd get a chance. Once I got with George [Clinton], I shared it. You be walking about ten miles away, and Kuti had a big club that had no roof on top of it, so anybody in the vicinity would hear this groove, man. As soon as you'd start walking towards that, you'd be grooving and you wouldn't even notice it. On and on, they grooved all night.

Funkadelic was famous for playing long numbers — was that the African influence?

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1951, William 'Bootsy' Collins was catapulted into soul history when he and his brother Phelps 'Catfish' Collins were flown to Columbus, Georgia, to replace the group James Brown had fired for protesting about work conditions. Billed as The JBs — now deemed the definitive funk group of all time — Bootsy played bass on "Sex Machine", "Super Bad", "Talkin' Loud & Sayin' Nothin'" and "Get Up, Get Into It And Get Involved" before mutinying in turn and joining George Clinton's Funkadelic/Parliament troupe, providing Clinton's Mad Science with crucial groove impetus. With Bootsy's Rubber Band's *Stretchin' Out* in 1976, America had hatched a new superhero, complete with starshaped space bass and outrageous cartoon concepts. On records like *Aah. . . The Name Is Bootsy* (1977), *Ultra Wave* (1980), *The One Giveth, The Count Taketh Away* (1982), *What's Bootsy Doin'?* (1988) and *Blasters Of The Universe* (1994, produced by Bill Laswell), Bootsy kept pace with avant pop novelties whilst maintaining a commitment to the Encyclicals of Funk — "Everything On The One" — originally declared by James Brown. Collaborations with Deee-Lite, Malcolm McLaren and Buckethead have been celebrated and denounced in equal measure by aficionados. Back with Warner Brothers, this year's *Fresh Outta 'P' University* presents a more mainstream blend of rap and ballads, though Bootsy's trademark sci-fi humour and elastically suggestive bass are still in evidence. Wearing star-shaped chrome shades, gold kneelength boots, black tights with gold thigh chain and the most elaborate CND statement ever sewn into a padded jacket, Bootsy beamed down into the Warner Brothers' Kensington press office like a communicant from a future planet of dayglo dimensional warp and post-tech gratification.

I don't think so. [Referring back to the Kuti record] I got to get a copy of this. Man, this brings back memories for real.

The guitar sounds like it was lifted from "Sex Machine".

That amazed me when we went over there — they had an electric guitar and electric bass. In Africa? This was in 1970, so I had no clue they'd have those, because we had just really got electric bass and guitar — they were around a longer time than it took me to get them. I wasn't expecting to find them there. It was real deep. They had a drummer with a trap drum, then they had four or five other cats sitting around the stage with other funny drums, it was amazing.

You're a drummer, too, aren't you?

I wouldn't call myself a drummer. I played on a lot of the Parliament and Funkadelic stuff. On this new record, I play on most of it. Most of the groovy hit stuff, none of the drumming 'performance' stuff, just a groove. I can keep that. I think George liked that about me, because I would keep it right there.

Nothing too fancy.

Not like a 'drummer' would do. He felt that my contribution would hold it together, compared to early Funkadelic which was just *out* there. When I came in from James, I started locking stuff up, as well as allowing craziness on top of it. George encouraged me. James wouldn't encourage me with the drums — besides, I was so amazed about the drummers that were there, and I got a chance to be right there with them and look at them and see how they were doing stuff. It was amazing, I wouldn't trade nothing for that, just being able to watch, oh man, Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo. Man, these cats were incredible!

They used to call Ransome Kuti 'The African James Brown'. That was one trip I wouldn't trade for nothing in the world. I never will forget that experience — and this groove, man.

MATERIAL

"Upriver" from *Memory Serves* (Celluloid)

It's got some different mixtures, then it comes in with a disco-type beat. 60s, 70s?

1980.

Slide guitar? Seems like maybe the violin player and the slide player might be from the same band, and they combined with this rhythm section, which at this particular time is probably the new band.

The bass player is someone you've collaborated with.

Bill Laswell? Wow! He gave me a lot of stuff to listen to. I didn't have a chance to listen to everything. I've never seen this. I might have to give Bill a call today about this, for real. "Upriver"? You wouldn't happen to have another copy of this? I was right about one thing, though — the slide guitar and the violin are different from the rhythm.

As a producer, Bill knew more about what I could do than I did. He studied it. That's why we worked together so well. I'd just do what I felt, but he knew how to go in and grab that feeling and say, 'Remember that song you did so-and-so on?' Somewhat like that, more that kind of feel.' He'd give me references. He was really good at pinpointing things.

How did you meet him?

I met him through Warners in the States because they wanted me to do a remix with him. They couldn't figure out *who* I could work with, they actually told me that! From that we went on to do other stuff. We just clicked. He was really perfect for me because he's wild, yet he's got a business organised type thing.

Like Funkadelic said on *One Nation*, "Rhythm 'n' Business"?

Yes, because before, people I was dealing with, if they were wild and crazy, *everything* was wild and crazy. Bill was probably the first one that was wild and crazy, but his business thing was set up, it was the A-B-C. That was a new leaf of life as far as I was concerned. To be creative is one thing, but to be able to be creative *and* have your business thing set up, that was like a dream come true for me. He gave me hope that I can be wild and crazy, but also at the same time I could set my business straight. Being a musician, you just want to go out and have fun, you want to play, you want to have a thousand girls, a thousand drinks, get high, orgies, that's all you're thinking about, you never realise about the business side of it, you don't even want to deal with that crap. Once you start making it pretty good and things start happening, then the business start getting in your face, much more responsibilities, it affects the creativity, it's like, how can you do both of them at the same time?

For the fans, you just seem to disappear for a while. They don't know you're knee-deep in accountants and lawsuits. . .

That stuff be killing you! It happens to everybody, nobody gets around it, there's nothing to show you how to get around that one, you've got to go through it. Unfortunately, a lot of us just don't make it. At the time I met Bill it was right on time. I was going through that, trying to figure out how to be creative and still have fun doing music with all this other crap cramming you down, like, 'I wanted to do this and that but I didn't realise all of the responsibilities, just let me go to the stage and play!' One day you wake up and you be on stage, and you have trucks and buses and taxis and babies right there on stage with you. Whooah!

The new album sounds a lot more mainstream-friendly, a long way from the kind of stuff you do with Laswell, or used to do with George Clinton and The Rubber Band.

I'll understand that, but it's like when I did this thing with Deee-Lite, all my fans were looking at me, like, 'What? You're going to do *what?*' But for me at that particular time, I needed to do something that would make them look at me and say, 'Oh no!' I did it and I took the criticism. Now I'm going to have to take the criticism — along with gaining new fans. I know in the end, bottom line is, if I have to revert back to what I do, it's no problem, because that's what I want to do anyway. A lot of the fans were telling me I should go back and listen to my old records, because that's the kind of stuff I should be thinking about doing. I think we still bring it across on stage like that, though, the sound of the old records — I think that's closest to it now, the live band on stage. That makes it all worth it.

SUN RA

"Astro Black" from *Astro Black* (Impulse!)

Oh man, this is incredible. He's got the groove there, and then everyone else is doing their own thing on top of it. It's not actually like a real live drum beat there, but you can still groove with it. The noises [Ra's Moog synthesizer] — was this redone?

No, it's all played in real time.

I'm sitting here trying to figure out. [Saxophonist Marshall Allen emits a high-pitched shriek]

Does that sound like [JBs saxophonist] Robert McCollough to you?

Yeah. Oh, you knew it? Ah man!

It isn't actually.

No, it ain't, but all the same, I just got off when you said it sounds like Robert McCollough. I didn't know you knew that — it sounds just like him! [I show Bootsy the

cover] I should have known, for real What year was this?

1972.

A lot of people would tell us how jazzy we were, and how all these great jazz guys admired what we did, but I never really got a chance like, I never heard this! That's why I told you at the very beginning that I probably wouldn't be no good at this test. I really never did listen I knew of these cats, but I never got a chance I wouldn't even say I never got a chance, I was never into listening because I never wanted nothing to influence what I was thinking Now I'm listening to this, I hear Bernie [Worrell] — it's all in there, I can hear it. People used to tell us, but I never really knew what they heard in it that was so but hearing this, I understand!

Sitting here in England buying records, we've got no idea — Sun Ra and Funkadelic — they all come from off-planet as far as we're concerned. . .

That's a whole other outlook on it. Wow! Man! Is this still around, can you actually get this? This is incredible! Everyone's going crazy! George was hip, he knew all this stuff He was hip to pretty much everything, because records was his thing Just to look at this cat Sun Ra and listen, it's so deep George got us when we were just babes, we had no idea, we didn't even have radios — how could we listen to anybody? The only chance we got to experience anything was to actually be there When I was coming up, no TV — nobody in the projects had TV Playing at King Studios for Bill Doggett, Arthur Prysock, Hank Ballard — that was pretty much it, that was all I knew, what was right there in Cincinnati I'll tell you a record we used to really get into when I first started taking acid was Howlin' Wolf I had all his records Soon as we started tripping it would be put him on, man! It became automatic — Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix, definitely Jimi! Those were the only records I really got into listening to

RONI SIZE & REPRAZENT

"Brown Paper Bag" (Mercury 12")

[Bootsy leans forward, listening into the music, then leans back and laughs] Sounds like the James Brown group on acid! This is great. I don't know who it is, this is really great. I like this, man, but I have no idea who it is Upright bass!

Did you ever play any?

In school I fooled with it When I was coming in it was phasing out, I didn't get hold of it like I wanted to, I didn't get a chance My brother, who's ten years older, he and his friends, they were the ones I'd go watch practise — they started out with the upright bass When I was able to start playing myself, I couldn't see myself getting an upright, because that was too much to carry around A Fender electric bass would cost too much I talked my mother into giving me a $29 guitar, I took the strings off and put bass strings on it, and it worked Matter of fact, I used that all the way up until I got with James Brown! He felt sorry for me and bought me a Fender Jazz Bass, the first real bass I had This is such a happening groove I have no idea what year

This year. This mix came out last week, in fact.

Because it has the old flavour, the sounds — the bass sound and the drums, the old sound I can hear it for today, but it has the sound of yesterday That's bad, man, whoever it is! [Responding to a *Bitches Brew* style hung harmony on electric piano] Those overtones, jazz overtones there

What do you think they've been listening to?

Jazz and funky grooves, James Brown

No reggae?

A little, but not dominant Sounds like something Bill would do too This is bad, I like it. Who is it?

It's Roni Size, a Bristol Junglist, and his group Reprazent. It comes out of drum 'n' bass, but they have a group identity non-clubbers can relate to.

This is really cool, I've got to let Bill Laswell hear this

DEVO

"Whip It" from *Freedom Of Choice* (Virgin)

Oh yeah! This is [Bootsy sings the guitar riff] Devo? I love this

Do you really?

Oh yeah! Come on, man, when this was coming on, things were changing anyway I tried to figure out how to change with it. We used to go to clubs and listen to this track.

Where?

In Detroit, we used to hang in Detroit, they had a couple of clubs I had the armbands, the motorcycle, it all kind of fell in anyway

Do you think Devo were an influence on Prince?

Oh, definitely, definitely Prince took what we were doing along with what *they* were doing and made it really commercial When we was coming up, we were from the streets and radio wasn't friendly Me and George would take our records to the DJs and their whole rap was, 'Too many airplanes in the records, man' They didn't like the spacecraft thing The way we got popular was with the people in general, they just grabbed us — mainly a black thing They grabbed us because they liked what we were doing, and they would come to the shows Forget the records! That's where "Take It To The Stage" came from, forget all the record stuff, just come to the stage! We'll show you That was basically our motto, and that's what really paid off for us Then eventually, 1978, 79, radio started picking up on us a little more But Prince had it all covered Then when the whole of America, the whole international thing noticed, it was, like, 'Wow! This is great stuff '

Prince paid you back by releasing a George Clinton album.

Oh yeah, but even if he hadn't had done that, he paid us back because he made people recognise that music was there People would never have listened to us otherwise I think Prince paved the way even today as far as rap Rap skipped over Prince, went all the way back — James Brown, Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy

How do you feel about being sampled?

Just like I was talking about Prince, I thought it was great! It gave us a chance to be rediscovered by the new generation — otherwise they probably wouldn't have known us from the hole in the wall! Like I was saying, Prince was the beginning of that. He was the first one to take what we were doing and make it, I guess, 'commercial', and for people to start talking about it a bit.

You don't hate pop, do you?

I started making a living with James Brown, but it doesn't mean that's all I like Just like a bus driver — just because he drives a bus don't mean he don't like flying planes! [Laughs] But you do find a lot of musicians who only like what they do and everything else is rubbish, so I understand that. When Kraftwerk came out, I bought the album Where I was at and what I was doing, it wasn't really popular, but it was popular with *me* I just liked it. I couldn't tell you what it was I didn't even know it was the next thing that was going to be in, that people were going to grab onto it.

Once Afrika Bambaataa and House got going, Kraftwerk's influence was celebrated. . .

This was before that, it was something about the *music* It was totally different from what we were doing, that's what drew me to it. It was the same thing with Deee-Lite I knew people wouldn't like the fact, but I thought that was cool I don't do things just because I think it's going to be popular I didn't know what was going to happen with Kraftwerk or Devo or Deee-Lite, there was just something about it that I liked To me, I'm not even going to say that I think the world would be a better place, but if people would just go ahead and open up, you know — if you like it, cool, if you don't, then it's still cool! Whatever you choose to do, but don't say you don't like it because *he* don't like it, you know what I'm saying?

FRANK ZAPPA

"Inca Roads" from *One Size Fits All* (DiscReet)

The vocals remind me of Earth, Wind & Fire, the way they go through different phases of timing, different musical styles, it's pretty cool I'm trying to figure out whether it's a guitar or a synthesizer

Guitar.

I was always into the music, but listening for sounds, not so much *what* a person was playing, but how did he get it to sound like that? [Listens to some fusion runs] I always loved this stuff, but I never really had a chance to get involved with it, groups like Weather Report. We used to do outdoor festivals on certain gigs and watch them and they were really amazing, but I never got a chance to get in a situation where you could do this

That was Frank Zappa.

They used to come to our real early Funkadelic shows in Boston, Zappa and his band This cat was truly amazing □

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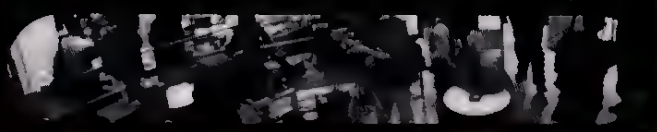

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charts

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15 Steps Ahead

Marilyn Crispell/Gary Peacock/Paul Motian Nothing Ever Was, Anyway (ECM)
The Apartments Apart (Hot)
Wire Coatings (WMO)
Mogwai Young Team (Chemikal Underground)
Nils Petter Molvaer Khmer (ECM)
The Fall Levitate (Artful)
Peter Hammill Everyone You Hold (Fie!)
Courtney Pine Underground (Talking Loud)
Labradford Mi Media Naranja (Blast First)
Yes Keys To Ascension 2 (Yes Records)
Ploppy Teach Yourself Chinese (demo tape)
Chris Cheek Skin Upon Skin (Sound & Language)
Giya Kancheli Light Sorrow/Mourned By The Wind (Telarc)
Anthony Braxton Quartet (Santa Cruz) 1993 (Hat Art)
Peter Case Torn Again (Vanguard)
Compiled by Rupert Loydell, Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 6EW

15 Fringes

Kaoru Abe/Sabu Toyozumi Overhang Party (Alm)
David S Ware Wisdom Of Uncertainty (Aum Fidelity)
Jim Hobbs Badadita (Silkheart)
Charles Waters & Andrew Barker Charles Waters & Andrew Barker (Earmark)
Evan Parker/Ned Rothenberg Monkey Puzzle (Leo)
Anthony Braxton Composition No 193 (Braxton House)
The XIII Ghosts Legend Of The Blood Yeti (Infinite Chug)
Kirlian Chicken Wings And Fried Beef Rice (Disko B)
Star Trek Special Sound Effects (GNP)
Conrad Schnitzler Rot (Plate Lunch)
Merzbow Scumtron (Blast First)
General Magic Frantz! (Mego)
Matmos Matmos (Vague Terrain)
Noto ∞ (Noton)
Various Studio 1 (Studio 1)
Compiled by Qbic, Fringes, Radio Onda D'Urto 98FM, Milan, Italy, Thursdays 7.45-8.45pm

Other Exotica 15

Sven Libaek Inner Space (Festival)
Kenny Graham Moondog And Suncat Suites (MGM)
Lenny Hibbert Creation (Studio One)
Sun Ra Nothing Is (ESP)
David Toop Spirit World (Virgin)
Jon Hassell Vernal Equinox (Lovely)
From Scratch Pacific 3, 2, 1 (Zero) (Flying Nun)
Uakti Trilobyte (Point)
Melon At Pithecanthropus Erectus (Alfa)
Alice Coltrane Universal Consciousness (Impulse!)
Ethel Azama Exotic Dreams (Liberty)
John Sangster Paradise Vol 1 (Trinity)
Ennio Morricone Exorcist 2 The Heretic (Warner Bros)
M'Boom M'Boom (Columbia)
Tak Shindo Mganga (Tikitune)
Compiled by Brent Clough, Other Worlds, ABC Radio National, Saturdays 10pm-midnight

Late World Noise 15

Various The Rough Guide To Flamenco (World Music Network)
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Kelly Joe Phelps Roll Away The Stone (Rykodisc)
Labradford Mi Media Naranja (Blast First)
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Stars Of The Lid Gravitational Pull Vs The Desire For An Aquatic Life (Kranky)
Pantunes Music In Search Of The Surface Noise (Sprawl Imprint)
Various Zabriskie Point OST (EMI)
Scientist Vs Prince Jammy Strike Back! (Trojan)
Clinic IPC Sub-Editors Dictate Our Youth (Aladdin's Cave Of Golf)
The Fall Levitate (Artful)
Aerial M Aerial M (Domino)
Photek Modus Operandi (Science)
Robert Wyatt Shleep (Rykodisc)
DJ Q We Are One 12" (Filter)
Compiled by Roger Hill, The Late World Noise, *BBC Radio Merseyside, Sundays midnight-2am*

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Eddie Prévost Trio Touch (Matchless)
Morton Feldman Neither (Hat Art)
Various Third Base (Base)
Mark Hollis LP (Polydor promo)
Clive Bell Eating (Sound And Language)
Various Live At Wrek (WREK)
Salaryman Tones And Superclusters (City Slang)
Jonny L Sawtooth (XL)
Badawi Jerusalem Under Fire (ROIR)
Add N To X King Wasp (Satellite)
Various Eclectronica (Foundry)
Arcana Arc Of The Testimony (Axiom US)
Various American Primitive Vol 1 Raw Pre-War Gospel (Revenant)
Compiled by The Wire *Sound System*

PHOTO NICK WHITE

Marilyn Crispell

sound check

Up the creek: December's selected albums and 12''s

Air
Moon Safari
VIRGIN V2848 CD/MC/LP

A Reminiscent Drive
Mercy Street
F-COMMUNICATIONS FC071 CD/2LP

French air comes in frothy little bubbles if *Moon Safari* is anything to go by. Nicolas Godin and Jean Benoit Dunckel are another example of the 'lite' motif Rob Young applied to Plaid (*The Wire* 164). Theirs is a music that seems to float, unanchored to either the ground or reality by anything so grubby or workaday as a bassline. (The exception, when it comes in the abrasive tones of "Sexy Boy", seem rudely shocking.) The duo from Versailles spin gossamer webs of sound, glittering palaces in the sky that seem impossibly intricate. These musicians are quite clearly under the influence of producers obsessed with the sheer beauty of sound construction. Brian Wilson, George Martin and, believe it or not, Jeff Lynne (listen to the vocodered chorus of "Kelly Watch The Stars" and tell me it's not true). These are no mere elegant foibles, however. There's a substance to the music that has its basis in the use of live instrumentation as opposed to sample skills. Rhodes, Moog, harp, horns: all are brought together in meticulously crafted arrangements. Yet the effect is one of complete insubstantiality. Music as ether. Sound that hangs vaporously and dissolves, leaving you gently gasping for more.

A Reminiscent Drive exist in a different atmosphere, less rarefied yet equally intoxicating. A selection of old and new material, *Mercy Street* highlights the distance between Jay Alanski and the Ambient tag with which he's (mis)labelled. Where most Ambient music is essentially static and flat, Alanski structures his tracks as if they were wordless songs (rather than strict instrumentals), resulting in a more contoured sound that always contains an element of progression, however meandering the pace may be. These tracks have a precision that Alanski shares with the best soundtrack composers. The brevity of the tracks (16 in 70 minutes) necessitates emotional economy: a simple phrase must encompass an entire scene's worth of feeling. Ambient allows itself the luxury of time and space to develop its themes. Here it's more like alighting upon a scene already in progress and leaving before its climax. More lifelike, and ultimately more rewarding.

PETER McINTYRE

Arcana
Arc Of The Testimony
AXIOM CD

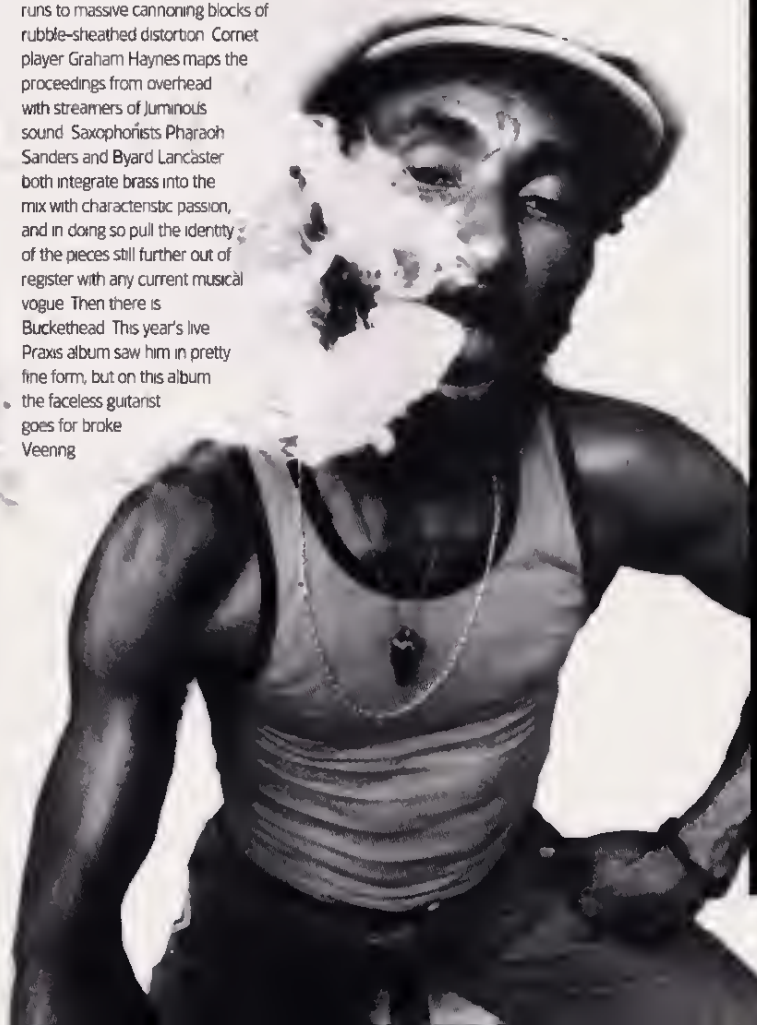
Even in a parallel universe where ECM's glacial manoeuvrings were irradiated by global warming and King Crimson actually continued to improve after the release of *Red* rather than imploding, *Arc Of The Testimony* would still be a killer album. The second (and last) of Bill Laswell's Arcana projects with drummer Tony Williams — recorded just before the latter's death earlier this year — finds an ensemble of searing talents articulating an unconstrained lust for pure playing.

Few drummers have ever exerted the kind of sculpturing force which Williams demonstrates here. Even given his extraordinary history, first with Miles Davis and then with his own Lifetime group, his playing on this recording avalanches through the tracks with a startling and seismic intelligence. Laswell's bass flips schizophrenically from boiled mercury runs to massive cannoning blocks of rubble-sheathed distortion. Cornet player Graham Haynes maps the proceedings from overhead with streamers of luminous sound. Saxophonists Pharaoh Sanders and Byard Lancaster both integrate brass into the mix with characteristic passion, and in doing so pull the identity of the pieces still further out of register with any current musical vogue. Then there is Buckethead. This year's live Praxis album saw him in pretty fine form, but on this album the faceless guitarist goes for broke. Veering between sweet, hovering sustains which ascend from the foliage of Nicky Skopelitis's lush chordal work, and sheer demented outbursts of frenzy, he is a pure joy to listen to. In fact, joy seems to sum up this release. The whole album is suffused with the fever of just playing like crazy. Each track goes for the throat, with no time for navel gazing.

Having said that, it is not a recording of relentless manic riffing or white macho my-valve-is-hotter-than-yours power posturing. The grander sections co-exist with some beautifully lyrical spacious terrain. There is something disarmingly direct and honest about this. The group's total engagement with the music is forcefully put across, with no thought whatsoever for the ephemeral chatter of those pigeons who build holes. Blissful.

PAUL SCHÜTZE

Smoke signals: Lee Perry reviewed page 59



Reviewed this month:

Air Horace Andy **Animals On Wheels** Arcana **A Reminiscent Drive** Martin Archer ***Avantgardism 2*** Bastard **Beautyon** Beresford/Palmer/Stagner/Turner **Peter Brötzmann/Mahmoud Gania/Hamid Drake** Cape Fear **Marilyn Crispell/Gary Peacock/Paul Motian** Dilemma **Marc Ducret** The Fall **Friend** Fred Frith & Noel Akchoté **Gemini** Bruce Gilbert **Handful Of Dust** Isotope 217 **Kosmic Messenger** David Kristian **Bill Laswell/Graham Haynes** Bill Laswell/Style Scott **Maciunas Ensemble & Kanary Grand Band** Gustav Mahler/Uri Caine **Anthony Manning** Christian Marclay **Material** Derrick May **Stephan Micus** Mouse On Mars **Non** *Noodles Part One (The Death Of Cool)* **Will Oldham** The Pastels **Lee Perry** Plaid **Produkt Stretch** FX Randomiz **The Recyclers** Ronnie & Clyde **Samarai Celestial** Kevin Saunderson **Shunatao/Anna Luif/Noël Akchoté** *Sound Gallery* **Space Explosion** Squarepusher **Yasunao Tone** Transient v Resident **U-Brown** Mika Vainio **Darrin Verhagen** Ralf Wehowsky **Wire** The XIII Ghosts **Yabby You** Claude Young **Frank Zappa** John Zorn ***plus new compilations, critical beats, global, jazz and out rock releases in brief***

Martin Archer
88 Enemies
DISCUS 10CD CD

Transient v Resident
Electrical Shroud
DISCUS 7CD CD

Various Artists
Sound Gallery
DISCUS 9CD CD

Discus is a Sheffield label dedicated to the prolific output of Martin Archer and his explorations of transmuted pianism. Archer's *88 Enemies* is a solo project, a "potentially infinite series" of compositions, in which filters and effects are applied to the source sound of a Proteus Grand piano. There are two longish pieces which explore multiple melodies, and six shorter, more focused treatments. The album title, Archer writes, "describes my relationship with the keyboard". He also admits that he uses "sequencers rather than virtuoso playing" because he has no option. All encouraging the charge that there's a lot of Techno ennui — both his own and that of his audience — to overcome here. Do Archer's technique and methodology give this music its character, or is this somehow inherent in the production process? An old dichotomy: does the greater part of this music derive from man or machine? These are significant questions which, left unanswered by the sound itself, engender an indifferent reaction.

Archer teams up with Chris Bywater for Transient v Resident, taking joint credit for "synthesizers, electronics and amplified objects" in a series of live improvisations which Archer describes as "Ambient to abrasive real-time synthesis". In reality, the effect is typically both Ambient *and* abrasive, with the latter tending to smother the Ambient. Archer has evidently devoted an awful lot of time and contemplation to his music, and it shows in keenly realised shifts of textural motion. The TvR duo derive much contrast from a pretty limited field of sound.

Perhaps the best place to test your affinity with this music would be the *Sound Gallery* compilation. Alongside two pieces by Archer, including part nine in the *88 Enemies* sequence, the disc also features compositions by Nick Bizzell Browning, Tim Risher, Dal Strutt and Michael Szpakowski. Szpakowski contributes three beautifully understated reflections on paintings by Edward Hopper for solo piano, Risher's trio Paragate fashion curious electroacoustics from minimal kit (is that Tom DePlonty making percussion sounds with his styrofoam or shock absorber on "The Only Reality...?"). Bizzell's "These Hands Aren't Mine" is simply neurotic, while Strutt contributes two acoustic codas, for clarinet, and for baritone recital with piano accompaniment. In this company, aided greatly by the contrasts, Archer's purpose becomes more coherent. His "Silver And White Sequences For Helmut Lemke", for synthesizer and three asynchronous sequencers, is particularly engrossing. Electroacoustics is often at its best, as here, when lengthy periods of alchemical, hermetic tinkering are boiled down with intent, and concentrated into relatively brief intervals of textural and thematic development.

TIM OWEN

Peter Brötzmann

Peter Brötzmann/Mahmoud Gania/Hamid Drake
The "WELS" Concert
OKKA DISK OD12013 CD

The ideological pretensions of 'World Music' are so bulky they have a habit of capsizing the humble musical vehicle. After listening to a Gabrielized Fateh Khan, jazz players fronting Tibetan monks, or free improvisors lost in a medley of kotos, berimbaus and throat singing, it seems that 'breaking boundaries' is a sure recipe for disaster ("Down with *laissez-faire* liberalism!" I want to reply, "let's build the barricades!") Then you hear a record like *The "WELS" Concert* and it's as if a cliff face has collapsed, revealing a strange new configuration simultaneously archaic and futuristic.

It would take someone who'd perpetrated the legendary Last Exit on the world to come up with a record like this. Peter Brotzmann is playing sax, alongside his drummer Hamid Drake, and the pair are joined by Mahmoud Gania. The latter plays traditional Moroccan guembri and sings — brief interjections, wild commentaries that are almost shouts. Gania keeps up the cascading series of polyrhythms familiar from the African thumb-piano. The guembri sounds like the inanga, the primal-guitar hollow log with wires played in Burundi. A cross between a drum and a bass, it's the acoustic preview of the singleton sound-pulse House music brought to the dancefloor. Gania's playing is fluid and funky-sweet, an echoic dance.

Drake understands Gania's rhythms by making commentaries and asides. He doesn't make the mistake of locking him into a metrical schema. Brötzmann, too, has the advantage of the improvisor's ear: his squalls go out into space powered by Gania's heart-pulse, then pause to register the effect. The music is coherent and flowing, bouncing with improvised repartee, yet also groovacious and gratifying. When Hamid and Drake duet, it's dub-like: the ear wanders among the different levels in stoned bliss. You note little games being played by cymbal and hi-hat, then drop down to the dialogue between the guembri and the toms. Brötzmann's variety of reeds — tenor, alto, clarinet, taratoga — throws glinting lights over his instantly-recognisable hard-knot tangles.

John Coltrane's drummer Elvin Jones discovered that the simple beat could be infinitely divided and therefore absorb countless traditional metres. Steeped in this knowledge, Brotzmann and Drake turn Gania's songs from ethnic quaintness into world-historical greatness. This is a record you can listen to all the way through just to hear the drums, it's that solid. A classic.

BEN WATSON

Cape Fear
Drift Towards The Heat
ODD SIZE OS 21 CD

Bästard
Side Stuff
SEMANTIC/DADDY'S LIPSTICK NO NUMBER CD

Post-rock reminds me of soccer's FA Carling Premiership — both are terms that don't inherently sound quite right, but cultural pressure is such that you eventually feel obliged to use them. These two examples of rock esoterica come from France. Both remind me fleetingly of the way newer German groups like Workshop and Kreidler are remoulding their Krautrock legacy into something new. But it would be a disservice to these musicians to saddle them with labels — the music on these albums is so individual that

maybe future groups will end up being compared to the current French scene

Of the two, Cape Fear's album is more consistent but less stimulating At times their agitated synthetic rhythmic base plays host to some big guitar riffs — there are three featured guitarists including Odd Size label boss Laurent Perrier, whose project this ostensibly is — with chords stacked up like breeze blocks But they are far more effective when they unveil their subtleties and play with space and samples This they do to great effect on "Worried About Resting", and the highlight is the 17 minute "Trapped" where the light mechanical rhythms, vaporous instrumentation and subdued chants parallel the territory Can visited on *Future Days*

Bastard's palette, meanwhile, seems limitless It's quite surprising to learn that they are formed from Deity Guns, who were blatantly influenced by Sonic Youth Now they reckon that guitars and drums are going out of date (how many times have we heard that before?), but still employ five guitarists and two drummers!

On *Side Stuff*, a collection of live and studio pieces from the last few years, Bästard try out new ideas in new combinations, some of which work, some of which are less successful But if their wayward elements were tempered then this audacious record would not exist The group profess a love of some of the groups affiliated to the UK's early 80s post-punk/Industrial scene They particularly invoke the spirit of 23 Skidoo, at least in their breadth of material they're equally adept at unquiet mood pieces and still-life tape loops with voices, like "The Saw", quirky, creaky guitar pop like the tongue in cheek "R 'N' R Star" and the tribal freakout opener "Mud" On the closing "Speleo" they use synthetic water drops, dialogue and what sounds like tectonic plates contact miked at the point of movement. A detailed personnel is included, but don't expect that to help you

MIKE BARNES

Marilyn Crispell/Gary Peacock/Paul Motian

Nothing Ever Was, Anyway The Music Of Annette Peacock

ECM 1626/27 2CD

Annette Peacock is probably best known for authoring a quantity of unsettling songs and singing them in a scalp-tingling manner Savour some of the best on *I'm The One* and *X-Dreams* if you can find them Where Diamanda Galas bludgeons, Peacock insinuates, but the effect can be equally unnerving check out Annette's sole appearance on "Dreams (If Time Weren't)" at the close of disc one of this new set, a collection of interpretations of her songs by three musicians closely associated with her

Peacock made her reputation in the 60s with a series of mysterious, fluid, tenebrous piano compositions which were aired on record by Paul Bley She had eloped to New York with Gary Peacock, who was then playing bass for Albert Ayler Gary soon joined Bley's trio, which began to feature Annette's tunes as heavily as those by Carla, whom Annette would succeed as Paul's significant other Paul's 1967 album *Ballads* used only Annette's tunes By the early 70s the couple were touring their Synthesizer Show, where the reflective beauty of her writing was smothered in the ferment of experiments with Moogs the size of barn doors The riskiness of those performances may be difficult to comprehend, now that computers the size of a cat-flap can create almost any aural experience without shedding a drop of silicone sweat

The slightly incestuous smack of the above-recited potted biog is intensified by this set. The bassist is Annette's ex The drummer also worked with Paul Bley There seemed to be a familial similarity in the tunes written by Annette and Carla, which may have been primarily attributable to Paul's interpretations. Whatever, Annette feels that Marilyn Crispell achieves the intended flow of her music where Bley did not. Accepting Annette's guidance on phrasing, Crispell nonetheless stays true to her own muse She is simply one of the finest pianists and improvisors around Her playing here — delicate and intense, serene and passionate — is superb, though less fiery and densely-packed than usual Gary Peacock and Motian are sensitive and responsive partners Annette could scarcely wish for a better tribute

BARRY WITHERDEN

The Fall

Oxymoron

RECEIVER RRCD 246 CD

By my reckoning, *Oxymoron* is the fifth installment in the Receiver label's perplexing sequence of Fall compilations Like *Sinister Waltz*, *Fiend With A Violin*, *Oswald Defence Lawyer* and *15 Ways To Leave Your Man* before it, the CD contains around an hour's worth of unreleased tracks, 'alternate' takes and live material The sleevenotes are beyond useless — they're downright misleading The 'alternate' takes come from 1996's *The Light User Syndrome* album "Hostile" recasts the iron-clad original as an amorphous dream-sequence, but the 'versions' of "Oxymoron", "Powder Keg" and "Interlude/Chillinism" sound like the original tracks subjected to utterly inconsequential (and uncredited) post-production studio treatments (it would be an exaggeration to call them remixes, even, let alone alternate takes) A very shoddy business, indeed

The two 'new' tracks, "White Lines" and "Italiano", are take-them-or-leave-them instrumentals, examples of The Fall's angular relationship with the machine rhythms and synthesized textures of House and Techno, but not much more

The rest of the CD is made up of live material "Pearl City", "Rainmaster" and "Life Just Bounces" (from *Cerebral Caustic*), "The Birmingham School Of Business School" (from *Code Selfish*), "Glam Racket" (from *The Infotainment Scan*), "Bill Is Dead" (from *Extricate*), plus "Behind The Counter" and something entitled "ESP Disco", which turns out to be a version of "Psychic Dancehall" from the 1979 *Dragnet* album. No revelations here, particularly (except for "Glam Racket", perhaps, during which Mark E and Brix Smith sound like they could be indulging in an on-stage marital row via an amended lyric) What's more, the tracks are sequenced with zero logic, and the sleevenotes fail to furnish even the most mundane details. no recording dates, personnel, or anything

Like previous Receiver releases (and there is another one due any minute, apparently), *Oxymoron* will no doubt be an 'essential' purchase for put-upon Fall completists, but its tawdry presentation adds little to our understanding (or enjoyment) of the most radical and misunderstood group of its time

TONY HERRINGTON

Gemini

Imagine-A-Nation

REUEF RR778 CD/2LP

Despite its utterly vital contribution to modern dance music, Chicago House has attracted little serious critical assessment. It has wanted for spokesmen as articulate, or leaders as determined, as Detroitians Derrick May and Mike Banks. And the minimal drum-heavy base of the music has never stood up to the constraints of the critic's living room stereo as well as the keyboard-led sound of Detroit.

But the city is currently churning out a new crop of talented House producers, and with the possible exception of the more minimal Berlin-exiled DJ Rush, Spencer Kinsey (aka Gemini) is probably the most radical and forward-looking of this latest generation

"Native To America" opens the album with a muffled Apache war drum before drifting into some distant brass flourishes "It's The Inside That Counts" has a more modernist sheen, featuring a math-minimalist riff and percussive bass cough, while "Falling Leaves" blends electronic atonalities with a solid funk backbeat

One of the defining events in the history of dance music in Chicago was the 'Disco Demolition' of 1979, when a group of rock DJs organised a mass destruction of disco records in the White Sox baseball stadium. On tracks like "Don't Look Back" and "Stand Up", fragments of all those shattered disco grooves are swept up and recast into hoops of iron

The LP closes ambitiously with the Acid House symphony of "Future Beat" Stark Acid — the liquid analogue croak of the Roland TB-303 — dominates "Future Beat I" "Future Beat II" keeps the same booming 909 kick pattern but adds some flourishes of BDB-style percussion "Future Beat III" brings the ideas together with a squawking bassline, a cavernous snare sound, and a layer of machine code over the top of it all An impressive and quietly audacious piece of work.

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PHOTO SOKHI WAGNER

Christian Marclay
Records
ATAVISTIC ALP62CD CD

Christian Marclay
More Encores
RER CM1 CD

Yasunao Tone
Solo For Wounded CD
TZADIK TZ 7212 CD

I'm sometimes surprised by Christian Marclay's lack of simple musicality, as on the reissued *More Encores*, where a Strauss waltz slows down, speeds up and skids into an unstable mire. Marclay's instrument of choice, the record turntable, and his position as a top-flight free improvisor suggest that music is his raw material, but this obscures the fact that his background is as an artist, not a musician. The self-explanatory *Record Without A Cover* and *Footsteps* (recordings of footsteps, left on a gallery floor, trodden on, and resold) both exemplify an abiding interest in the medium more than the message, in the way the idiosyncrasies and fragility of vinyl colour our experience and memories of music.

The appeal of Marclay's art lies in the way it forces into violent yet poignant confrontation two elements of the listening experience which normally strive to remain apart. The music itself, supposedly existing in the abstract and divorced from the medium, comes with coded overt and covert meaning. In contrast, the disruptive snap and crackle of degraded vinyl brings its own layer of meaning through vinyl sentimentalism and nostalgia.

Marclay uses all the usual tricks of the turntable DJ — changing speed, reversing, scratching, mixing multiple decks at once — but also 'prepares' the surface of his records with paint and stickers. When he cuts up vinyl and glues it back together as collage, the pop indicating the transitions is as relevant as the music spliced together.

Records brings together compilation tracks, rarities and previously unreleased pieces, and is a dense, sinewy set of improvisations which foreground the degraded medium, confusing the signal with the noise, adding a fracture to every new rupture. It's fresh and disruptive, although the carefully structured "Groove", a lush mesh of layered drones, is a little out of place. *More Encores* concentrates on one musical source at a time, separating Martin Denny from John Cage, John Zorn from Serge Gainsbourg. It's a smoother, less fragmented affair, although every bit as remarkable. As with John Oswald's *Plunderphonic*, the emotional associations of each source are as important as the way the music is restructured. *More Encores* is at its best when working against type, as when highly rhythmic pops punctuate a Cage collage, or when the piercing voice of Maria Callas absurdly fails to stop for breath.

Yasunao Tone might like to be Marclay's avatar in the digital realm, but Tzadik's hype is disconcerting. They'd have us believe that this is "a new noise music for the 21st century: a symphony of digital errors that reaches a new extreme in intensity and musical energy". I can only guess that the label hasn't heard the compositions of (say) Paul Dolden or Chris Koenigsberg, either of whom make Tone sound like Easy Listening, and the latter of whom conjured up far more viscerally fucked-up digital detritus on his wonderful *Brains* album.

Like Marclay, Tone is more of an artist than a musician, and like the German trio Oval, he expresses the admirable desire to break out of the pre-programmed CD straitjacket, to exploit digital errors as the source of new creativity. *Solo For Wounded CD* offers a fluttering swarm of monstrous alien locusts as the result of his experimentation. There's an antagonistic and debilitating nervous energy behind this malignant buzzing, and although the hype is overstated, it's a remarkably fraught sound, especially when it intermittently erupts into torrents of coruscating digital discord. For its singularly caustic unfriendliness alone, it's well worth hearing, but I can't help thinking again that others have explored CD deconstruction more thoroughly elsewhere. Tone relies entirely on a CD prepared with transparent sticky tape; others have documented the use of glue, permanent ink and even a microwave oven to open up far more varied opportunities for guerrilla action.

BRIAN DUGUID

A Handful Of Dust
Spiritual Libertines
CRANK AUTOMOTIVE C6 CD

In the free jazz vs free improvisation debate, it's wrong to treat them as brands to choose between — both genres are fraught with tension and temptations to compromise. Though people who call free improvisation 'elitist' have evidently never encountered it in its natural habitat (upstairs in a pub), Improv *can* suffer from an art-tone archness. It saps the form, suppressing the complexity and richness of its instrumental production. This is where the New Zealand lo-fi contingent scores so well: the post-Dead C continuum has absorbed rocklist drama into its noise making. Like improvised records by old Canterbury Scene alumni, their instrumentalism has an expressive naivety which the beautiful souls of high technique cannot call on.

Spiritual Libertines consists of tracks recorded between 1994 and 1995. What's been released before was on cassettes and a 7" single well-nigh impossible to find. Bruce Russell and Alastair Galbraith bang guitars, strum oil-drums and scratch violins. St John Perse recites a hermetic text. Kiwi blank verse in a deserted hall. Kate Russell and Peter Stapleton exceed all rational noise levels. It's a fantastic interpenetration of opposites: off-hand uglinesses are suddenly splendid and beautiful. Every gesture is *meant*. "The Oneness Of Adam Qadmon" even features synthesizer — almost heresy for lo-fi — but it's attacked with speculative insanity akin to Sun Ra's bonkers logic.

Guy Debord's words — on how media 'commonsense' makes extraction of surplus value invisible — appear in the CD insert. Uncredited. But then *Society Of The Spectacle* was issued anti-copyright, so that's correct, too. Spot on.

BEN WATSON

Isotope 217
The Unstable Molecule
THRILL JOCKEY THRILL049 CD

Separate lines of avant garde music history are brought together on this debut by Isotope 217, a wonderfully chimerical ensemble featuring members of Tortoise and The Chicago Underground Orchestra. Drawing from free jazz, hard bop, funk, dub and post-rock, without resulting in some featureless muddle or lifeless 'fusion', the group's aesthetic simultaneously recalls different aspects of early 70s musical experimentation. The Art Ensemble Of Chicago, *Bitches*

Brew/On The Corner-era Miles Davis, and vintage King Tubby Isotope 217 don't merely assemble these diverse elements in one place, but rather explore the common ground that already underlies them a shared emphasis on texture, timbre, space and groove

The stamp of Tortoise is evident in the rhythm-heavy nature of much of this material and its constant subjection to dub-influenced studio effects Tortoise percussionists Dan Bitney and John Herndon provide a busy backdrop of trap drums, congas, drum machines and electronic squiggles, while former Tortoise bassist Bundy Brown and current Tortoise sound designer Casey Rice share production credits But *The Unstable Molecule* amounts to much more than Tortoise gone funk, or jazz in dub Jeff Parker's full, deep and mellow electric guitar, Rob Mazurek's cornet peals, ripples and smears, and Sarah P Smith's sultry trombone contribute sounds and strategies that counter and complement the funky drumming and dubby dabbling It's clear that everyone is learning from one another here, the spirit of collectivism that animated The Art Ensemble and its compatriots seems to inspire this outfit, too Writing credits are shared by the group as a whole, and despite the trad/free jazz pedigree of Parker, Mazurek and Smith, the emphasis remains on group playing rather than standout soloing

Funk-driven tracks alternate with more sombre textural explorations, but throughout, a basic compositional strategy prevails short melodic figures are stated on one instrument, relayed to others, orchestrated, dubbed and abstracted The extraordinarily simple and beautiful "La Jetee" *[sic]*, for example, takes several cello arpeggios, transforms them into a dreamy six-note synthesizer tune, adds horn accents, restates the tune on guitar, and then dissolves it into a brief, lazy and breathy trombone solo The longest and richest piece, "Prince Namor", offers room for some glorious collective improvisation a collage of arco bass drones and knocks, brushed drums, treated guitar, massed horns, and tape manipulations It also highlights the one legitimate complaint with this recording its brevity (six tracks in just over 30 minutes) and restraint. As wonderful as this stuff is, one longs to hear the group in looser and more extended settings

CHRISTOPH COX

David Kristian
Cricklewood

ALIENB ALIENCD5 CD

If you don't know David Kristian from his previous drum 'n' bass releases, or from his contributions to Lo Recordings compilations among others, then you will miss out on the surprise of this new release The Canadian artist has ditched his drum machines in favour of a favourite synthesizer, the EMS VCS-3, as primary sound source, and a whole bundle of kit for sound conversion and processing "Most of the sounds were generated in real-time using control voltages derived from pitch material from other instruments," apparently, with a Fender Precision bass as control source

Kristian conceived the disc as a tribute, both to electronic instrument pioneers Electronic Music Studios of London, and to *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack composers Louis and Bebe Barron Inevitably, this raises high expectations, which Kristian has met with a meticulously crafted set of the first order In other hands the currents and frequencies at the heart of his music could conspire to make the listener quite ill Kristian, however, manages to induce just that subtle degree of queasiness, to add a visceral edge to the sonorities he crafts These are minimalist works in the best sense, deep as the deepest dream-blue of Yves Klein or Derek Jarman *Cricklewood* infringes upon the provinces of Ambient soundscapers and the Electro avant garde alike, but its singularity of intent puts all comparisons out of mind For anyone with the least interest in quality Electronica, this is essential listening

TIM OWEN

Maciunas Ensemble & Kanary Grand Band
Live With The Birds

APOLLO RECORDS ACD 129615 CD

A pioneer of sound art, Paul Panhuysen has been blazing a vaporous trail along the shifting faultlines separating music and art for more than 30 years now Not the least of his achievements is his ongoing work, the *Long String Installations*, on which he performs by drawing his resin-coated fingers along strings running the length of a room, affording the visitor the experience of being in the bowels of an enormous stringed instrument.

Live With The Birds, his latest CD, is an equally fascinating project realised with The Maciunas Ensemble, an improvising group he co-founded in 1968 A collaboration between its four members, who strike, caress and tap aluminium strips, and The Kanary Grand Band, an ensemble consisting of about 40 birds, it takes improvisation in unheard-of directions Past attempts at making music with animals have met with varying degrees of success, yet the music on this album attains a rare beauty The birds react vociferously to the complex textures and pitches produced by the aluminium strips, thereby engaging in a remarkable dialogue with the musicians

Amplified by piezo transducers, the visceral, relentless sound produced by the aluminium strips is reminiscent of pealing church bells Yet here the bells have run amok and their deep tones occasionally rise to paroxysmal levels During these passages the birds' joyous warbling takes on a looming, ominous slant. The third track consists solely of birdsong, and by this time the listener's ear is fully attuned to the musicality of their song *Live With The Birds* is a means of reconnecting with the natural world, a move away from the anthropocentric foundations of Western music making

RAHMA KHAZAM

Gustav Mahler/Uri Caine
Primal Light

WINTER & WINTER 910 004 CD

Marc Ducret
détail

WINTER & WINTER 910 003 CD

In his brilliant essay, "Mahler Our Contemporary", Pierre Boulez pointed to the intense ambiguity in Gustav Mahler's work between sentimentality and irony The stock of "banalities" which are a fixture in the music — funeral and military marches, waltzes, folk songs — contrasts with the big theatrical gestures and undermines them In his remarkable arrangements from Mahler's symphonies and songs on *Primal Light*, Un Caine has returned these popular elements to the cafe society where many of them originated or found a home

Caine was asked to 'arrange' Mahler's music to accompany a silent movie about the life of the composer His arrangements might be the first since Schoenberg's Society for the Private Performance of Music (1918-21) But while Schoenberg went in for faithful chamber music reductions, Caine engages in a dialogue with the composer Guardians of high art such as Boulez will probably dismiss the result. They may well be appalled, but they will be missing something valuable

The arrangements show a wide variety of styles, often within the same symphonic or song extract. But one key aspect of Mahler — his Jewishness — is focused on Most of the 14 musicians involved are Jewish, from the New York downtown scene, and klezmer and cantorial singing — notably Aaron Bensoussan on "The Farewell" from *The Song Of The Earth* — are central elements The familiar song "Frere Jacques" is in minor mode in the third movement of the First Symphony, and it's followed here by a swift transition into klezmer that isn't so distant from Mahler's ironic original Don Byron's liquid clarinet takes the lead on the folk song, and then abruptly turns to reprise his Mickey Katz routine

There are arrangements of Mahler's tragically prescient *Kindertotenlieder* — *Songs Of The Death Of Children* — with jazz piano trio on "I Often Think They Have Merely Gone Out" The famous Fifth Symphony Adagietto against which Dirk Bogarde took a prolonged *Death In Venice* is here, too Dave Douglas's trumpet and Mark Feldman's violin have leading roles, and the beautiful melody is intercut with shimmering, darker episodes in a way that suggests Charles Ives more than Mahler In addition to cantor Aaron Bensoussan, Dean Bowman and Arto Lindsay also contribute vocals The orchestrations have their less successful moments — for instance, the way the piano is made to answer the trumpet lead near the start of the funeral march from the Fifth Symphony But this is an extraordinary recording that will take more than a few listenings to reveal its secrets

Primal Light belongs in the jazz/classical special projects section of the new Winter &

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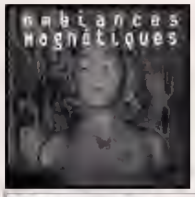

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Winter label. This is Stefan Winter's independent successor to his JMT label. Its three lines — jazz, special projects and classical — and Munich base will inevitably draw comparisons with ECM. The CDs come in strikingly designed corrugated cardboard cases that bespeak superior production values — though I foresee problems over the durability and protectiveness of the box.

From the jazz side of the label is *detail*, 43 minutes of pieces for solo guitar by Marc Ducret, who plays a six or 12 string acoustic instrument. Ducret is another JMT artist and frequent collaborator with Tim Berne. Buried deep in the inspiration of this music are memories of the blues. But on a first listen it's the splintered, fractured shards of avant garde guitar lines that stand out. The recording is very physical, with the effort of fingers or plectrum on strings quite evident — not at all the soft-focus ambience found on ECM. The pieces are mostly rhythmic, even swinging, and a bluesy, Country twang softens the rather bleak tonality. Some pieces — such as "Ma Plus Belle Histoire D'Amour" — are more lyrical. An impressive achievement by an underrated guitarist.

ANDY HAMILTON

Material
Seven Souls
WORLDLY TRILOKA 314 534 905 CD

Bill Laswell/Graham Haynes
Sacred System: Chapter Two
ROIR RUSCO 8233 CD

Bill Laswell/Style Scott
Bill Laswell Meets Style Scott Inna Dub Meltdown
WOROSOUND WSCD021 CD

The disembodied vocal pulse of the recently deceased William Seward Burroughs still rumbles clearly through this partly remixed version of Material's *Seven Souls*. Back in 1989, Bill Laswell based the original album in part on Burroughs's writings, most notably *The Western Lands*, the final novel in a trilogy which began with *Cities Of The Red Night*. That instantly recognisable, all knowing, carrion-crow croak of a voice reverberates creakily alongside Laswell's loping bass patterns.

Eight years down the line, *Seven Souls* remains thunderously fresh, despite the production facelift. There is a menace in the mix that still sounds hungry, a simplicity in the playing and sampling which has been stripped down until Burroughs's acid drip drawl becomes the main instrument that the other members of Material circle around.

"Soul Killer (Remote Control Mix)" is the most effective makeover. Here Wild Bill's spoken prose has been broken down, transformed and disfigured to form something that sounds like abstract electronic notes filtering from the ruptured speaker of some ancient valve radio. Meanwhile, the equally distorted, towering might of Laswell and his group opens fire behind him. Newcomers to this powerful record should investigate this new version without delay, while those already familiar with what has to be, arguably, Material's perfect beat, should get it for the remixes alone.

Laswell's meeting with cornet player Graham Haynes on *Sacred System. Chapter Two* (a title that teasingly recalls Jamaican producer Joe Gibbs's dub anthologies) is another record fresh with surprise. Here the emphasis is on Haynes's 'Electric Miles'-style horn playing, around which Laswell's echoing tabla 'n' bass-boom prowls like a hungry black panther waiting to lash out whenever Haynes pauses for breath.

Dub Meltdown is an enjoyable enough, but less satisfying union, this time between Laswell and veteran dub drummer Style Scott. As its title suggests, this is a 70s roots driven, drum 'n' bass dub work-out in the grand tradition of King Tubby, Prince Jammy, Observer and countless other mixing-board pioneers. It hits all the right controls, but fails to drag the genre into any dark corners that haven't been investigated already. Despite excellent, energetic contributions from both players, the promised meltdown never fully materialises.

EDWIN POUNCEY

Derrick May
Innovator
TRANSMAT TMT 4 2CD

Kevin Saunderson
Faces & Phases
PLANET E PLE65235 2CD

Kosmic Messenger
Stacey Pullen Presents The Collected Works Of Kosmic Messenger
ELYPSIA ELY 015 CD

Claude Young
Soft Thru
ELYPSIA ELY 014 CD

Past its glory days, clothed in a mantle of mythology that is now set in stone, and so full of itself it hurts, it's next to impossible to assess Detroit Techno properly. There is undoubtedly great music that has come, and is coming, out of Detroit, but its genre conventions seem so rigid that it's hard to say if the music has moved anywhere in the past decade. On evidence of these three retrospectives and one new album, it has — but with baby steps.

Aside from Lou Reed, is there anyone in music who takes him or herself more seriously than Derrick May? Like Reed's pretensions to literariness, May's portentous synth chords, titles and self-mythology offer a convenient camouflage for boys who can't admit to the essentially lightweight or emotional nature of their obsession. No wonder he's the poster boy for the UK's legion of dour electronic music lovers. But do they know that he once said that his own music makes him cry, or is their knowledge limited to what kind of drum machine he used on the "Living Room Mix" of "The Dance"? Given the flowing melodicism of May's work, it's hard not to think of the sci-fi rhetoric as anything but post-human sophistry. "Strings Of Life", Techno's ground zero in the UK, remains breathtaking ten years after, but its almost ethereal emotionalism couldn't be more different from the martial mechanics and logical funk that came in its wake. With the exception of his more percussive tracks ("The Dance", "Nude Photo", "The Beginning" and maybe "Freestyle"), May's records deploy techniques and timbres that tug on the heartstrings in a manner not entirely dissimilar from — oh, I don't know — Abba or Bonnie Tyler. All night, so he coaxed some tears and sighs out of machines previously thought to be cold and sober. Well, so did Patrick Crowley and Sylvester, but they weren't afraid to take the piss out of themselves. All of which is not to say that May isn't capable of making great music, just that it isn't as futuristic as he and his champions think it is.

Paradoxically, the music made by the most commercially successful and most dancefloor-minded of Detroit's big three (May, Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson) speaks far more of a fleshless, synthetic future than anything May ever recorded. *Faces And Phases* reveals that outside of his Inner City guise, Saunderson used synthesizers on their own terms, rather than as things to be bent to his own needs. If Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards had grown up in Detroit in the early 80s, then Chic would have sounded like Saunderson's "Rock To The Beat": an intense groove built on layers of tension undercut by a disembodied vocalist singing an exhortation that you can't trust. Nothing else here is as great as "Rock To The Beat" (well, maybe "The Groove That Won't Stop"), but this is as good a synthesizer record as you're ever likely to hear.

Stacey Pullen belongs to the second generation of Motor City Techno musicians and, as such, his music doesn't work as the result of the spark of invention, but as the continuation of a tradition. Despite its youth, Detroit Techno is most definitely a tradition: hi-hat patterns with a fast triplet feel, a deceptively lush melodic sensibility and an all-ton often ignored sensuality are the rule. Pullen's stated interest in moulding the latter with a sense of spirituality doesn't come to the fore in his recordings as Kosmic Messenger, but what does is his skill as a producer. There's nothing mind-boggling here, just everything that you'd expect from Detroit.

Claude Young represents a bridge between the verging-on-tunefulness of Techno's birthplace and the sine-curves-with-kick-drum aesthetic of Europe. Young seems less concerned with making 'beautiful music' than his fellow Motown denizens (Jeff Mills aside), concentrating instead on minimal instrumental

Anthony Manning
Concision
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Beautyon
NoO2, BCG50, The Ultimate Mediterranean Savage
IRDIAL DISCS 64IRD BTO5 CD

Dilemma
Chip Tunes
IRDIAL DISCS 67IRO OCT1 CD/LP

Anthony Manning

From outside, the activities of Akin Fernandez's Irdial label might appear increasingly wayward and obsessive Fernandez's exacting tastes in electronic music are often the subject of club anecdote praising or berating DJs for playing records at the the wrong BPM rate, research trips to oil rigs off the Angolan coast, album launch parties with champagne-serving flunkies. E-mails sent via the Irdial Website get bounced back unanswered if unencrypted for security, while album sleevenotes and pamphlets urge psychic militancy against the economic forces that turn us all into passive consumers

The latest batch of Irdial releases include Fernandez's own project, Beautyon's *NoO2*, and a keenly anticipated third by Anthony Manning.

Concision will be something of a disappointment for admirers of the ear-boggling genius of Manning's previous two, *Islets In Pink Polypropylene* and *Chromium Nebulae*, on which he summarily dismissed a drum machine (on the former) and various synthesizers, from their accustomed duties. *Nebulae* was reportedly the result of months of immersion in Beethoven, but *Concision* sounds as though he's developed a tooth for Emerson Lake & Palmer Track two is the exception a fantastically creepy fantasia for overdriven Wurlitzer and a clavinet sopping with flange — you smell a fleapit cinema's rank, nicotine seat-odour. But overproduction and naff pianistic flourishes mar several of the other tracks — experiments that should have been learnt from

Beautyon's *NoO2* is a computer composition which can "only be experienced correctly from a Compact Disc", and in which "the sleeve of the LP is part of the sound". Unfortunately, all that's been sent is an unlabelled cassette, so you'll have to rattle your own jewel case. Another sales point: "*NoO2* was constructed entirely inside a computer and no conventional recording techniques were used to produce any of these pieces". Nothing new there you could say the same about the early 60s compositions of Max Mathews and Jean-Claude Risset — working intra-computer at New Jersey's pioneering Bell Labs — or a contemporary Techno act like Autechre. So where does *NoO2* (as in 'lack of oxygen') fit in, in a year that's seen an unprecedented slew of digital grumblings on CD from the likes of Mego, Touch, Blast First, Rastermusic, etc? As a demonstration of the power of computers to shape entirely foreign, unnameable sonic substances, it's incomparable Here a viscous trickling like amplified spinal fluid, there a ringing Velcro-drone worthy of early Boyd Rice, elsewhere an amazing barrage that's one bit bass tube screamer to two bits distant dirtbike rally. Junkies waiting for their next Ryoji Ikeda fix shouldn't hesitate.

Chip Tunes, by Ostend's Ken Dutruie, is full of the very dated squelches, splurges and Casio VL-Tone blips so beloved of artists on the Rephlex label — noises that are replacing tinkling soft toys and squeaking rubber ducks as the nostalgic sounds of childhood But regression — whatever form it takes — is never a pretty thing to observe, and this unlovely, nerdy demonstration-track fodder is the kind of thing that brings Electronica into disrepute.

ROB YOUNG

settings and distant signals As its title indicates, *Soft Thru* features neither bludgeoning drum programming nor keening keyboards, only a deep regard for texture and nuance — in the finest tradition of Detroit

PETER SHAPIRO

Stephan Micus
The Garden Of Mirrors
ECM 1632 CD

Accompanied by a press release warning critics against making taxonomical judgments about Stephan Micus's ingenious music is a tactic that's a little unfair After all, what else is one to do when faced with a composer whose career has embraced upturned flowerpots, bowed Indian dilrubas, the gentler qualities of Caribbean steel drums, and now, on *The Garden Of Mirrors*, two types of African harp the gut-stringed bolombatto and the hemp-stringed sinding All this, plus a profusion of words how this is not African music so much as African ambience, and so on

One can only sympathise Classifications in music may be necessary evils, but they can too often cause the wider horizon to disappear In Micus's case, this seems to be about breaching boundaries and sliding through a musical multiculturalism to make something that's both personal and accessible It has to be said that *Mirrors* is an enchanting album, whose very quietude is its heart It's also a feat of studio technique Micus plays all the instruments, including various woodwinds from Egypt, Japan and Bali, and multitracks accordingly 20 (Micus) voices on "Earth", seven bowed sindings on "Violeta", three tin whistles elsewhere The shamanic sounding percussion at its start quickly gives way to a slow, deeply rhythmic work, in which male voices — both solo and in unison — join in Its harmonic lullings are reminiscent of Polynesian choirs and the end results are indeed intriguing Micus achieves a wonderful sense of space in his carefully constructed work. *The Garden Of Mirrors* certainly warrants a wider audience than it will probably get It doesn't deserve to end up as a high class vesion of pap like *Adiemus*, but there's an awful feeling that it will

LOUISE GRAY

Mouse On Mars
Instrumentals
SONIG 001 LP

FX Randomiz
Goflex
A-MUSIK A9 CD

Mouse On Mars are hitting a prolific spell at the moment Recent collaborations have yielded the *Cache Coeur Naif* EP with Mary Hansen and Laetitia Sadier of Stereolab, production input on the 'Lab's excellent LP *Dots And Loops*, and of course their own fine *Autoditacker* album This recent flurry of activity has been rounded off with the vinyl-only release of *Instrumentals* — this time on the group's own label, Sonig

The black sleeve is decorated with Mirô-like creatures which indicate typically squelchy, capricious contents But the album is darker and more brooding than their releases for the Too Pure label A good half of the music is breathtakingly original On the sparser tracks like "Pegel Gesetz" and "1001", the duo's trademark densely-packed style is decelerated and atomised "Subnubus" is stunning, with a middle section of mutating electro-phantasms bookended by a piano theme over a loping rhythm There is a dub influence both to this and to "Rompatrouille", where non-drum breakbeats chirrup away in the background Essential

FX Randomiz (real name Felix) has worked with MOM's Jan St Werner, and his sounds come from a very similar creative wellspring It's difficult not to laugh aloud during the opening "Abdon", when he utilises his palette of Clangers-ish whistling exclamations, static bursts and wobbly rhythm tracks with all sorts of pointillist details flecking the mix "Dirtum" is a gorgeous piece with all the ticking and clicking swathed in recurring piano arpeggios and snatches of distant atmospheres. Occasionally the detail becomes uncomfortably dense, perhaps Randomiz could use space more effectively As if in anticipation of this train of thought, the closing track, "Gweng!", swings around a bizarre groove lots of material bouncing around in musical Brownian motion for four minutes before cutting to a coda of complete silence with one short blip every minute or so OK Felix point taken

MIKE BARNES

Non
God & Beast
MUTE CDSTUMM 158 CD

For all his love of kitsch and his background as iconoclastic prankster, Non's Boyd Rice is still plagued by controversy. Several releases espousing a social Darwinist philosophy (morality as a fraud in a society defined primarily by power relationships) encourage accusations of crypto-fascism. *God & Beast*, like its immediate predecessor *Might*, fails to leaven the superman fantasies with much in the way of obvious irony. Perhaps, however, it owes as much to 19th century anarchist Max Stirner's idea of society as a "union of egoists", engaged in "the war of each against all", as it does to Nietzsche.

You really have to ask just what this music is for. *God & Beast* is certainly a much more measured, more carefully considered take on carpet-bomb noise assault than his singular early efforts from the 70s. It's a brutal hullabaloo recast as Ambient music, richly layered tapestries of obnoxious rumble that prove predictably exhilarating. It works surprisingly well as a soundtrack to everyday activities or locations. This reviewer tried it out in a launderette, and the thunderously violent rhythms, alongside the black, brooding atmosphere worked surprisingly well alongside the pulverising spin cycles and stark interior. It's hard not to fall back on irony when faced with Rice's increasingly ridiculous lyrics: try *"Only the law/of tooth and claw/only the law/of blood and flame"* from "The Law" and you'll laugh to avoid wincing. This track is actually where the album works best, with clouds of beatific *"lah-lah-lah"*s, sung by former Strawberry Switchblade vocalist Rose McDowall, providing an unexpectedly amusing contrast to Rice's po-faced repetition of *"law"*. Although more such unlikely unions would help, *God & Beast*'s singleminded nihilism still exercises a peculiar fascination.

BRIAN DUGUID

Space Explosion
Space Explosion
CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-067 CD

The cover and title of this album inextricably link it to the arcane, spectacularly daft stuff that one can imagine stacked in browsing racks in German record shops circa 1972. And appropriately so, as Space Explosion are a bona fide Kraut megagroup. Mind you, the line-up — Moebius from Cluster, Zappi and Peron from Faust, Amon Düül II's Chris Karrer, Jurgen Engler from Die Krupps on guitar and synth, and Guru Guru drummer Mani Neumeier — has the potential on paper to produce either brilliance or some kind of stoned jam session nonsense, given some of their parent groups' rather faded reputations. But *Space Explosion* is a superlative display of rock-based improv.

The question that immediately springs to mind is how such a disparate crew got together in the first place. Especially considering the territorial antipathy that some groups, Faust specifically, had towards their peers back in the 70s. Here, however, their collective sense of purpose is palpable. Apparently the project had its genesis in the recent Moebius, Engler and Neumeier collaboration, and harks back to the late 70s when Moebius recorded with Conny Plank as Liliental. He had always planned to get a group of this nature together, and recently the time seemed right to send out invites to the musicians he most wanted to play with.

The astonishing thing is that the music, though no doubt largely spontaneous, sounds as empathetic as if it were the product of a group that had been playing together for years. Along with a hard-edged intent, there's a sense of space, with no one being too intrusive or merely coasting. In fact they all play beyond themselves. *"It's not music, the sound of not-music,"* intones Peron on the introduction to "Toub", a timbrally rich freeform weft of percussion, synths and Karrer's warped folk violin (his playing on violin and sax is excellent throughout) which segues smoothly into a spate of rhythmic upheavals during which Neumeier's deft, syncopated beats clash with Zappi's more erratic clattering. "Space Explosion" is a short piece. Peron intoning in French within a framework of synths that chirrup and slide into deep bass registers and dubby drum treatments. The first and last tracks (both clocking in at over 16 minutes) are the most satisfying. The opening "Dino Dream" begins with Karrer's violin and Peron's trumpet etching out agitated lines, while Engler's eerie voice-processor gives a wordless, often guttural commentary. After a while the percussion drops out into a beautiful free passage, with Engler's and Peron's guitar-picking hinting at pastorales that never fully form, before the ensemble ride out on a — dare I say it — Can-like groove. On the turbulent, closing "Krakatau" they pull out their best freeform and rhythmic moments. Characteristically, the odd flurries of musical argument between the players are stated, then sink back into the collective sound — the bigger picture is always in view. At their most abstract, Space Explosion come across like an energised EAR, but with detail taking precedence over Ambient wash.

Apart from the endearingly kitsch kosmische trappings of the package, there's nothing remotely nostalgic about this album. While many younger groups in Germany and elsewhere are being labelled, often only semi-appropriately, as carriers of the Krautrock flame, some of the genre's oldest practitioners have got together to stake their claim on different ground altogether. None of them have ever played material quite like this before. That's remarkable in itself, and more importantly, so are the results.

MIKE BARNES

Will Oldham
Joya
DOMINO WIGCD 39P CD/LP

Will Oldham, once the main man behind Palace and all their various incarnations, has never been one to make concessions. *Joya*, his first solo album since Palace Music was dispatched, earlier this year, with *Lost Blues And Other Songs*, a golden compilation of greatest (non-)hits, is similarly thrifty. Oldham's music, descried in some quarters as a cross between Nick Cave and a backwoods Neil Young, is a strange beast, yet for all its under-production, thrifty instrumentation and cracked voices, there's a quality which is as fresh as it is also dangerous. It's certainly something to do with Oldham's approach to the English language, which he twists like an Appalachian boy brought up on the King James Bible. His songs consistently hint at, if not a real danger, then perceived ones. Palace's first album was entitled *There Is No One What* [sic] *Will Take Care Of You*, and that dark, unidentifiable fear powers on through Oldham's work.

The shape it takes on *Joya* is typically vague: it's not the weird sex that informed earlier songs like "Riding" or (ahem) "You Have Cum In Your Hair", but it's reflected in the *"bestial gallery"* of the opener, "O Let It Be", the *"Swinging back from one chord to another/Try to focus on what I'd learned from my mother"* of "Antagonism". One suspects that all Oldham's songs aim towards an ambivalent state of stillness, hence their sparse, oblique nature. Making it clear then that this is a sterling album without a single hit on it (not even one entitled, with no help from Madonna, "Open Your Heart"), *Joya* is a tantalisingly miserable affair. 12 songs of jolting existential cowboy songs whose odd visions rise up like weird horizons. Palace veteran David Pajo, now bassist in Tortoise and his own group Aerial M, brings to Oldham's four piece group a sense of the necessary atmospheres, stretching the best moments from the drone accompaniment of "New Gypsy" to the stoned blues (as distinct from the pinks, blacks or stripy pills) of "Apocalypse, No!". This is maverick music at its best.

LOUISE GRAY

The Pastels
Illumination
DOMINO WIGCD 34 CD/LP

First off, forget anything you thought you half-knew about The Pastels. With *Illumination* they've taken on the slack word-jumble of the kings of the nocturnal US underground (Silver Jews, Galaxie 500), lifted moves and

methodologies from the sweetest soul-finger jazz (the mighty Bill Wells contributes piano and arrangements), and created a pop album with all the heavyweight mainstream repercussions of a 90s *Smile*

The Pastels have always had an on/off relationship with popular culture, and *Illumination* is chock-full of ruminations on the nature of success and the fate of visionary artists who try to take their message out beyond their hermetic back-patting circles Despite the beautiful melancholy of tracks like "The Hits Hurt" (*"Defeat, defeat, you don't wanna hear about a jazz musician, a jukebox and a river"*), a paean to the lonesome death of Albert Ayler, and "Unfair Kind Of Fame", a eulogy for no-budget Hollywood visionary Ed Wood, there's an ever-present feeling of impassioned optimism, of seizing the moment. There's no question that The Pastels' previous lessons/defeats in 'the marketplace' (ugh) only reinforce the urgency of getting the message across, of not leaving popular music to the squares, of the modern artist's responsibility to interface with popular culture

Within that popular form, though, anything goes. For a group which is still your basic four piece rock unit, The Pastels have all the deep-sound pulse of an organic throb-orchestra, all muggy bells of reverb and stellar jazz movement. It's a futuristic and utopian pop-slant and an exploration of nocturnal ambience and empty city streets "Remote Climbs" is a spaced and splayed spy-soundtrack, complete with distant Morse-bleep and delayed guitars, whereas "The Viaduct" levitates effortlessly through layers of Velvets-sheen guitar and ghostly whispered vocals in a beautiful hymn to stasis Guest credits include Norman Blake and Gerry Love of Teenage Fanclub and Dean Wareham of Galaxie 500/Luna, giving the whole project the air of a heavyweight dream-pop summit, an outward-bound musicians' collective.

So The Pastels have changed the ground rules, taken space-bleep and barré-chords and married them with some of the most inspired songwriting this side of the Atlantic. The gauntlet is down who else will be brave enough to take it on? Right now, they're out there on their own

DAVID KEENAN

Lee Perry & The Upsetters
Musical Bones
JUSTICE LEAGUE JLCD 5002 CD/LP

Lee Perry
Upsetter In Dub
HEARTBEAT CD HB77 CD

Lee 'Scratch' Perry
Technomajikal
ROIR RUSCD 8232 CD

Musical Bones is the third in a series from the small Birmingham-based, Lee Perry-dedicated reissue label Justice League It was recorded in 1975 at the Black Ark studio, and the original issue was limited to 300 copies — which makes this to all intents and purposes a new release It belongs to the same period as *Kung Fu Meets The Dragon*, a long way from more elaborate experiments but featuring a limber group of musicians and a capacious bagful of rhythms Unique in the Perry catalogue, it's an album of trombone instrumentals, showcasing the considerable talents of Vin Gordon (aka Don Drummond Jr) Gordon has a big, full tone and his solos are warm, assertive and assured, spinning the music into territory outside reggae In fact, his sureness of touch highlights a few uncertain moments among The Upsetters — in places the album has the unpolished feel of a rehearsal On the plus side, these instrumentals send out tentative shoots into dub territory (with very light use of reverb and drop-outs), and hark back towards Jamaican jazz. Besides that, there are the expected bizarre tendrils creeping out of Perry brain-space — "Raw-Chaw"'s cranky hopalong beat, and the tinkling percussion on the lounge-reggae of "5 Cardiff Crescent", for example Vinyl-fiends are served, but the CD contains five extra, mostly desirable odds and ends culled from other sessions A footnote, to be sure, but worth investigating for another perspective on the Perry phenomenon, make no bones about it.

Closer to the heart of the Ark is *Upsetter In Dub*, a compilation of rare Jamaican B-sides which saw the light of day this summer but has only recently hit the racks in quantity There are inspired dubs of Junior Murvin's "Roots Train", "Tedious" and "Police And Thieves" (a previously unreleased melodica version), Max Romeo's "War In A Babylon", and "Foundation Solid" and "Ark Of The Covenant" by The Congos, alongside a winning collection of lesser known versions Most of the tracks date from the Black Ark 1976-77, though a couple thought to be recorded at Randy's cut the mustard proudly, including the soaring "Rejoice In Dub", one of those numinous Perry masterpieces which offer a hotline to the Holy Spirit in three burning minutes The sleeve boasts "heaviness", but light-headedness seems an more apt description of where the shifting surfaces of this music lead A useful companion to Island's recent *Arkology* set — strip off, dive in, the mix is lovely

Post-Black Ark, the Perry pickings are notoriously slim — some surprising depths have certainly been plumbed in the long autumn of Scratch's life *Technomajikal* is a collaboration with another self-appointed whacko (and fellow Swiss resident), Yello's Dieter Meier Collaboration, in fact, is hardly the word when Perry is merely stuck in front of the mic to reel forth a mix of banal rhymes and self-dramatising mantras. What was once a soupy and strange way of speaking is reduced to self-parody to the nth degree The music is whimsical Techno-poop, ghastly beyond words Wide berth advised

WILL MONTGOMERY

Ronnie & Clyde
In Glorious Black And Blue
SWIM WM15 CD/LP

Plaid
Not For Threes
WARP 54 CD/LP

Fresh from Colin Newman's Swim label come John Ross and Rob Fitzpatrick, renamed, for that extra thrill of it all, Ronnie & Clyde It is, make no bones about it, a glorious debut. Instrumental, constructed from breakbeats tied together with a sinuous line in melodies, *In Glorious Black And Blue* — as *noir* as its title suggests — is an object lesson for those seeking to integrate technical know-how with any sense of structure or drama

There is nevertheless a basic frame of reference to the album a funked out, sotto voce drum 'n' bass shuffle that gives way, on points like "Twice Removed" or "Theme From A Lazy Life", to some half-buried sonics that draw you in with a compelling sense of deja vu Paralleled to Plaid's second album, delivered three years after leaving The Black Dog, it suggests that welcome developments are in progress

Not For Threes provides Plaid's Ed Handley and Andy Turner with a spectacular reason for a return While their earlier work very much extended the well-mined vein of darkened, filmic Techno, the duo seemed to have used the interim time (spent producing and touring with Björk and Nicolette, both of whom seem to have switched on to the idea of dirty, digitalised sound design) to lighten up Whether the album's title is a sly dig at The Black Dog's former trio configuration or not, there's a confidence here that's more in evidence, say, than on their debut *Mbuki Mvuki* It has to do with an ability to span both Ambient and Techno, and in doing so, move off into entirely new areas of concern Hence the high life tremors of "Myopia", the rich, velvet synth chords that pull "Prague Radio" towards memories of *Low*-period Bowie, and, oddly enough, what seems to be an extended rereading (via David Sylvian) of Junior's funk hit "Mama Used To Say", on "Kortisin" Witty

LOUISE GRAY

Samarai Celestial
Cosmic Gold Millennium
CARROT TOP RECORDS SAKI 014 2CD

If, like me, you haven't caught the Marshall Allen-led Arkestra of late, and you missed out on the previous Carrot Top LP *Isis Sun*, chances are that Samarai Celestial is nothing more than a cool sounding name for a jazz dude You'd be half right. Samarai Celestial has been an Arkestra member for some time now (though Robert L Campbell makes no mention of him in his, er, 'exhaustive' *Earthly Recordings Of Sun Ra* discography), touring Europe and the US as the group's in-house drummer In his spare time he puts together weird space-funk-Electronica and gives out on the 'Celestial Skin

피치카도 화미브

Ralf Wehowsky/Various Artists
Tulpas
SELEKTION SCD 024 5CD

The work of Ralf Wehowsky in this age of standardised, easily digestible musical fare raises a disquieting question: has the modern-day listener lost the faculty of devoting time, attention and a certain amount of thought to music? *Tulpas*, Wehowsky's latest release on Selektion, poses such a challenge: it is a five CD set that clocks in at just under six hours, and the texts that accompany it are recommended reading if one is to grasp all the ideas behind it. Yet for those who dare to take the plunge and listen to what Wehowsky (aka RLW) has to say, the rewards are many and varied. Beautifully packaged in the form of a book, *Tulpas* took two years to complete and consists of interpretations of old and new RLW material by a long list of contributors: these include Merzbow, Marchetti & Noetinger, Rehberg & Bauer, Achim Wollscheid, Aube, John Duncan, Ryoji Ikeda, David Grubbs and Jim O'Rourke, as well as a number of lesser known, like-minded participants drawn from all corners of the planet. The album's title provides a pointer to the concept behind it. According to Tibetan lore, tulpas are fleeting apparitions whose function is to lead other beings towards enlightenment. Likewise, RLW's sparse, silence-ridden music remains the inspiration and starting-point for these pieces, even though they jettison much of the original material. Wehowsky has always regarded his compositions as being in a state of flux: they are transient manifestations of ideas that are to be reworked and reinterpreted, and with *Tulpas* he is delegating this task to other musicians.

Throughout the duration of these five CDs the pace rarely falters: for the most part the contributors demonstrate a masterly handling of atmosphere and effects, summoning up half-formed utterances, faint oneiric dirges, intangible silences and unidentifiable clanks and thuds. Ios Smolders's cut-ups, repetitions and pitch transpositions form an eerie, disquieting soundscape, while Marchetti and Noetinger take a harsher, more disruptive tack. Other memorable moments are provided by the foghorn blasts of Werner Durand's buzz-clarinet, David Grubbs's stark voice collage, and Giancarlo Toniutti's thunderous, all-enveloping waves of sound. Like the rest of RLW's work, *Tulpas* is constantly transcending accepted notions of musicality, and for this reason, too, merits far more than a cursory zap.

RAHMA KHAZAM

Ralf Wehowsky

Instruments' for some of the heavyweights of the American free scene. *Cosmic Gold Millennium*, luckily enough, showcases both.

Disc one, subtitled *Creation's Call*, is an effortlessly blown set from a group which comprises Bobby Zankel on alto (played with Cecil Taylor, spewed a couple of rare solo LPs for Cadence) and Rick Iannacone of Ornette/Decoding Society 'fame'. The five pieces run the gamut of slo-mo fairground space-waltz, breathy Ornette tag-chasing ("New Formalation") and savage piano cluster-slam, as in the closing "Ra's Shadow". Recorded using a "revolutionary recording process" known as Stereosonics, pioneered by Alan Blumlein half a century ago, the effect is somewhat akin to a deep reverb plate without any of the audibly digital aura.

Disc two, *The Intergalactic Compository Of Funk*, sees Samarai alone at the keys, engaged in some heavily rhythmic analogue-synth explorations. It's an incredibly dense and drug-muffled piece consisting of heavily repeated key-hammering with the occasional descent into Ra-like abstract circuit board disruption. If this was on A-Musik, affiliated people would be falling over themselves to get a copy. As it's actually made by a free jazz veteran in a leopardskin cloak capable of channeling messages from beyond the stars, well, that's even cooler.

DAVID KEENAN

Shunatao/Anna Luif/Noël Akchoté
Autoretrat/The Story Of Ball Paul
AMANITA AMA030 CD

Fred Frith & Noël Akchoté
Reel
RECTANGLE REC K 10"

The Recyclers
Morceaux Choisis
RECTANGLE REC1 LP

Shunatao, who occupy the front end of the Amanita CD, are a non-straight four piece French 'rock' unit (guitars, bass, drums, piano, operatic warble) who combine all the percussive plunk and moan-space of something like Spontaneous Music Ensemble's *1, 2, Albert Ayler* with some genuinely fried God Mountain-esque dynamic slipping and sliding, culminating in a scratchy and eminently satisfying free-for-all. Along the way they throw convincing approximations of a Velvets-damaged Sun City Girls, a gleefully under-rehearsed Magic Band, and (unlikely as it seems) a few jokes about Steve Albini. When guest saxophonist Eric Pailhe lets off one of his squalls, it's just so much icing. The genre-buggery continues well into the second half of the CD where all-round guitar Renaissance man and leading luminary of the French free scene Noel Akchoté pairs himself off with guitarist/vocalist Anna Luif for a series of vaguely directed yet sonically dead-on improvisations. Luif's vocals are, by turns, a less irritating Bjork and (when she's talking/reading) a hazy Patti Smith, and Akchoté's accompaniment is solid and inspired throughout — whether it's the driving downstroke pummelling of the opening "Searching Paul", or the fiery guitar duel (like a fantasy Henry Kaiser/Loren Mazzacane bout) of "27th Street", they work as a great tag-team.

The Akchoté/Frith pairing (on the French Rectangle label, Akchoté's own avant/rock vinyl-only imprint) isn't any less inspired. Someone (I'll stick my neck out and say it's Fred Frith, but it's hard to tell who's playing what — always a good sign) seems to be going at it with what sounds like a Goddamn metal rod eliciting industrial-scale resonance and clunk, while elsewhere (Akchoté?) there's a lightly stroked high frequency click which, with the aid of a volume pedal, makes for some beautifully restrained and complementary sonics. All this tense texture shift means that when they really let loose with feedback and fuzz it's an overwhelming experience.

The Recyclers, a trio featuring Akchoté, Benoit Delbecq on piano and Steve Arguelles on percussion, are another thing entirely, combining 'nouvelle vague' stylings with loose stabs at soundtrack standards by the likes of Serge Gainsbourg and Jacques Brel. While it's an entertaining and (sometimes) cheesily humorous slab of late-night listening (especially one-time Kieslowski star Irene Jacob's hushed rendition of "La Rua Madureira"), the 'point' being made (aside from Akchoté's declared love of cinema) is such a slight one that's it's by no means a vital acquisition.

On the evidence of these discs, Akchoté's emergence — alongside the likes of Keiji Haino, Mazzacane and Jim O'Rourke — is an utterly thrilling prospect. As the genre boundaries between free improv, jazz and outward-bound rock dissolve and new areas of no-holds-barred investigation open up, we need more artists like these: loose, unhinged and genre-defiant.

DAVID KEENAN

Squarepusher
Burningn 'N' Tree
WARP WARPCD 53P CD/LP

Animals On Wheels
Designs And Mistakes
NINJA TUNE ZENCD 32 CD/LP

Friend
Hot Rod
DOT DOTCDD3 CD

The Pusher and his dependents. When Tom Jenkinson recorded the tracks gathered on *Burningn 'N' Tree* back in 1995 — a private joke in a suburban bedroom — could he have anticipated the tonnage of petroleum product that would become graven with all those broken, rollicking clatterbeats spawned by his imitators? Released on the tiny Brighton indie Spymania, those tracks formed a miniature mindblast. As with The Residents' *George And James*, a painstaking facsimile of every huff, puff and audience whoop on a James Brown live LP, you had to marvel at the stupid industry with which Jenkinson must have programmed in all those juggernaut drum charges, blurting tattoos and sexy hiccups, to end up with that 'who put itching powder down Alphonse Mouzon's shirt?' trademark.

It made a refreshing respite from the rest of 1995's hyped drum 'n' bass scene, certain quarters of which were beginning to develop an unhealthy, arrogant sense of their own worth. Where high-profile DJs like LTJ Bukem were giving their tunes pretentious titles like "Music" and "Horizons", the self-styled Duke

Of Harringay's scorching live sets, fretless bass and all, were communicating a real exhilaration at the dizzying feats of sensory derangement that can be achieved with relatively simple technology, and a frustration that it couldn't be pushed any further. Enjoy these early works, then, for the discoveries they represent — there's been no significant change in style since. The Squarepusher set the pace, and he'll probably be the first to destroy it.

Animals On Wheels is the pseudonym of Andy Coleman, whose first releases were on the Spymania-affiliated label, Bovinyl. Announcing itself with a snatch of Thelonious Monk, *Designs And Mistakes* soon obliterates all such nods to history with a tumble of ludicrous beats and shoehorned-in synth-flaps. What follows is a collection of tracks that appear singularly uninformed by any coherent aesthetic or ideological vision. The notion of the design flaw in relation to music reproduction has been studied far more productively by Christian Marclay and Oval, to name but two, here the conceit seems merely to mask a series of chaotic, unfocused, hastily edited breakbeat collages.

This is Chitty Chitty Bang Bang music: a garden-shedload of overcooked, failed patents that please only their inventor. The description of Coleman's dwelling on a Cambridgeshire houseboat surrounded by his friend's collection of wheely fluffy toys doesn't help dispel the image of a bonzo eccentric labouring away in quaint isolation.

No telling whether Swede Magnus Aström, aka Friend, is a lovable eccentric or not, but the latest addition to the clean-scrubbed Dot roster sounds like he knows his way round a drum kit. Although this record couldn't have sounded the way it does without Squarepusher, Aström takes a different route from Animals On Wheels, polishing up Jenkinson's thunderous rhythms and writing them into a sweeping, rarefied swamp of keyboard ambience that recalls the early drum 'n' bass exploits of Global Communication. The programming is at times exhilarating — "Fetma" is springwound James Brown haloed with popping congas — and he achieves a real attenuation of speed and momentum with a dexterity unattainable by a human drummer.

ROB YOUNG

Mika Vainio
Onko
TOUCH TO 34 CD

Produkt Stretch
Produkt Stretch
RASTERMUSIC CDR 010 CD

Darrin Verhagen
Soft Ash
DOROBO 012 CD

Static and rumblings from the heaving netherworld of electronic sound experimentation. These three CDs come from different angles, ranging from picking over the remains of Techno to causing high levels of sonic disturbance. There's smoothness to some of the Produkt Stretch material, but the best work here is drawn by the scurf of electronic space.

Onko is Panasonic man Mika Vainio's first release under his own name — his solo material has until now come under the Techno minimalia guise of Ø. The album marks a new departure for this mysterious musician, who now turns away from the vestigial dancefloor patterns that haunt most of his projects. The nearest parallel to this picks up from where the Ø contributions to Rastermusic's *Mikro Makro* album were heading, embarking on longish episodic pieces. At the centre of this album is a loosely structured 36 minute work which passes through many phases, ranging from crackle and static to tape-recorded atmospheric sound. While spareness remains the byword — parts of the piece are near-silent — there is a definite attention to wider sound sources than hitherto. The stark warmth previously favoured gives way to an unsettling succession of darkly themed noises. A strong flavour of indeterminacy develops as the listener is drawn into sounds that waver and change shape before disappearing again into silence. In the end, however, the focus of the shorter pieces wins out, with Vainio racking up the tension through sheer concentration. Like watching grass grow while a battery of demonic lawnmowers hover in the background, ready for the kill.

The album by Produkt Stretch (Rastermusic's Frank Bretschneider, with occasional others) is an armchair Techno enterprise, released by the more 'conventional' arm of the label (as opposed to its Noton imprint). The album's most interesting points are in the places where drums are left behind — the 30 second snippets which separate tracks are scrawls in the margin that command attention. The opener is a nicely shaped, slow-rolling minimal Techno piece that makes play with the ends of the register — thrumming bass tones and tinkling peeps contend with bass drum and hypnotic funky interventions. Elsewhere things are different, with far more play in the drum programming. The 15 minute "Wellen" opens with a long passage of humming noise, before settling slowly into a rhythmic pattern, it's a full five minutes before the tune takes shape, turning bathetically into a quirky little slice of post-Techno.

Soft Ash is the first solo album by Darrin Verhagen of Shinjuku Thief. It's a collection of pieces inspired by lethal contaminations of the atmosphere, ranging from late 19th century London fog to Chernobyl. Ah, and the composer has conveniently tagged his works: we move from "Isolationist" through "Romantic" to "conceptually inaccurate ambience/falsified atmospheric" in an unstitching of the categories that would define such soundworks. At the same time, each of the pieces creates a nuanced and highly specific atmosphere. Many techniques are used — a piece inspired by Bhopal is constructed from the tape hiss from "badly mastered recordings of Indian music", the Chernobyl piece mixes tuned bongoes with Russian news footage, while another uses "filtered pumpkin scrapings". Despite the variety of sound sources, the album draws continuity from the stillness and calm lurking behind the works — a powerful way of approaching the terror of death-dealing airborne agents.

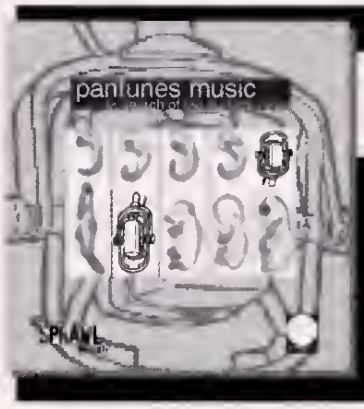
WILL MONTGOMERY

Various Artists
Avantgardism 2
LAW & AUDER LA3 2CD

In hindsight, associating the kind of Electronica that's found its way onto this compilation with the avant garde seems like special pleading. In fact, this music — high-street stores file it under something like 'leftfield dance', but it routinely possesses too many gear-shifts and breakdowns, and not enough rump-rolling low frequencies for dancefloors — arrived late in the cavity which Acid House, rave and Techno had carved out of popular culture by the beginning of the 90s. It was their clubs which provided the chill out zones requiring a liquidy comedown music, something that would twitter away in the middleground, but stay groovy enough not to completely erase the appetite for further movement. Now, the small-time runnings of many electronic indie labels have become so endemic that it's become that much easier to ignore the music, even though there's so much of the damn stuff out there.

With the theory and practice of true advance guards like Russolo, Cage and Burroughs fully assimilated into the cultural bloodstream, corporate music is beginning to enact scattered clawback gestures towards the avant garde — remixes neuter the effect of Pierre Henry; DJ Spooky turns up on a PolyGram Classics album, it takes *Pulp* to organise a benefit for La Monte Young. Meanwhile, dozens of compilations like *Avantgardism 2* appear every month. The album's 26 tracks — mostly from British producers — are a pretty representative sampling of what's on offer in this sector right now. The first disc focuses on the fallout from drum 'n' bass: T Power's varispeed show-opener "Dissipative Structures", Plug's cheeky "Lunar Laugh", "Uptripper" by Rhys Chatham's programming partner Martin Wheeler, a brilliant piece of Theremin-squirt from Canadian David Kristian, plus an emission from Black Dog Towers that beats anything on 1996's *Music For Adverts*. The best of disc two includes Freeform's hi-def skiffle, typically fastidious trick-stickwork by Bedouin Ascent; a handful of very odd *Flash Gordon*-meets-breakbeat pieces by people with names like Dan Gulberry and Mung; Boymerang's sleek remix of Plug's "Me & Mrs Jones", and an apolitical Electro-stomper from Muslimgauze.

However, that's still only a 50 per cent strike rate. As a single CD, this could have been a brilliant, if mistitled, collection. The sleeve quotes from Scottish art journal *Variant*: "One man's avant garde is another's cultural mainstream". But with this kind of stuff flaring into pop before your eyes in places like Germany, Austria and Japan, you'd



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Yabby You
Jesus Dread 1972-1977
BLOOD AND FIRE BAF 021 2CD/4LP

U-Brown
Train To Zion
BLOOD AND FIRE BAF 020 CD/LP

Horace Andy
Good Vibes (1975-79)
BLOOD AND FIRE BAF 019 CD/LP

The latest examples of maverick scholarship and lunatic obsession from the indefatigable reggae archivist Steve Barrow

Yabby You, aka Vivian Jackson, was one of the premier roots reggae producers of the 70s. While he might not be as well known as Bob Marley, Burning Spear, Culture or Joe Gibbs, *Jesus Dread* proves that he was every bit their equal as both an artist and producer. Working with Robbie Shakespeare and Aston 'Family Man' Barrett, Yabby You excelled at what is the glory of reggae, a bass sound that manages to both hang in the air with the ghosts, and groove something fierce. The first disc of this two CD set is afflicted by the inclusion of x-amount of versions of his classic Rasta chant "Conquering Lion" (surely anyone willing to shell out for a double disc set of Yabby You material doesn't need reminding that reggae producers endlessly recycled rhythms). That said, however, this means that Big Youth's staggeringly great rendering of "Conquering Lion", "Yabby Youth", gets to strut magisterially next to both the original and King Tubby's deeper-than-deep dub version, "Big Youth Fights Against Capitalism".

Rapping over the usual quota of Johnny Clarke and Cornell Campbell hits, U-Brown sounds utterly unremarkable on a cursory listen. Like his mentor U-Roy, though, U-Brown has an amazing croak emanating from God knows where that punctuates his best phrases with a strange authority and creates a kind of bass scatting effect. He might not be as gifted with the utterly bizarre non-sequiturs as someone like I-Roy, but as an expressive instrument U-Brown's voice has few equals. Also, check his rhythmic facility on "The Big Licking Stick" and the awesome reading of the "Real Rock" rhythm on "Bits Of Paper". Maybe only demented freaks need more than a couple of Jamaican DJ records, but *Train To Zion* is as good as any if you haven't gotten your fill with U-Roy, Big Youth or Dennis Alcapone

Like Blood And Fire's previous Horace Andy release, *In The Light*, *Good Vibes* focuses on his late 70s period in the US, when he was busy re-cutting classics like "Skylarking" and "Don't Let Problems Get You Down" to service the burgeoning dancehall community. While revisiting previous hits has a dubious history (see James Brown, John Lee Hooker, Sister Sledge *et al*), the re-workings included here are, for the most part, stunning. The Prince Jammy Disco Mix of "Mr Bassie" is remarkable. Jammy's imprisonment of Andy's fragile, strangely nasal falsetto in a cathedral of bass and effects reminds me of The NYC Peech Boys' "Don't Make Me Wait" where producer Larry Levan locked singer Bernard Fowler in a vacuum tube of repressed desire. The 1976 version of the immortal "Skylarking" benefits from a more streamlined groove and feels every bit as fatalistic as the 1972 original, while the 1978 remake of "Don't Let Problems Get You Down" loses most of the original's feyness because of Andy's more relaxed and assured vocal. The best thing here, though, is the stark, incredibly bass heavy "Youths Of Today". As usual, definitive and revelatory.

PETER SHAPIRO

have to be pretty far removed from both society *and* its discontents to make this the centre of your world

ROB YOUNG

Various Artists
Noodles Part One (The Death Of Cool)
NOODLES NOODLES 1 2LP

From Si Begg's self-proclaimed "stupidest recording organisation in the world" comes a spasmodic collection of inspired noise which does for Electronica what Genesis P-Orridge's *Jack The Tab* did for Acid House — or maybe what John Zorn's Naked City did for Thrash Metal. *Noodles Part One* sets out its stall with a flickerframe collage which moves from impulsive giggles to giddy scratching via symphonic Apple Mac chimes, ersatz TV sports theme music and a simulated Stephen Hawking vocal in 53 seconds — and manages to sustain the deranged/intuitive impetus over four sides and 60 minutes of deliciously wayward and downright funky experimentation

Along the way we meet such colourfully-named contributors as Anal Parade, The Hibiscus Geronimo, The Third Players and Van Der Hoog's Country Curative. The music similarly veers from coarse pranksterism to thoughtful wit — a lo-fi group belching session called "Boiled Grease Feast" at one end of the spectrum, a quizzical dubwise exploration of vocal harmonics with explicit reference to Stockhausen's *Stimmung* at the other ("Sing Circle System"). Apart from the locked grooves which end each side, the only real unifying factor is the shared mood — a bizarre union of openmindedness and barely-suppressed hysteria — which makes repeated listens both genuinely funny and consistently intriguing.

A few random highlights, then. "Desparate" by Sand, which sees propulsive jazz drumming join with curiously warm squalls of freeform trombone before disappearing slowly into a slew of street noise and static. The amniotic Gabba of Barry Pseudonym's factually-titled "Hi Pitch Acid". The Wee DJs' "How Was It For You?", which splices together stuttering runt rhythms and dark dream noises, a descending liturgical figure halfway between Verdi's *Requiem* and early Parliament, military snares, soul vocals, and a trippy rendition of "Una Paloma Blanca" (this has to be heard to be believed, actually). Best of all, though, is the aforementioned Van Der Hoog's Country Curative, improbably produced by an ex-member of late 80s Nottingham weirdoes Jackdaw With Crowbar. 'Psychedelic Country dub' is the genre, and a wired, brain-slashingly strange hoedown is the result. All in all, *Noodles* is a unique and highly rewarding combination of rigorously applied theory and unflagging joie de vivre. Or, as Mr Mahoney's "The Cucumber Song" would have it, *"Get your knob right out of my mouth, vicar"*

CHRIS SHARP

Wire
Coatings
WMO WMO14 2CD

Bruce Gilbert
In Esse
MUTE STUMM171 CD

20 years down the road and no sign of tiring. Colin Newman's, Graham Lewis's and Bruce Gilbert's idiosyncratic odyssey must have a sponsorship deal with Duracell somewhere. Thankfully, of course, they have managed to couple stamina with sensibility, unlike most of their weary post-punk cohorts

That's not to say the longueurs haven't crept in, indeed, the prolific nature and intensity of Wire output makes glitches inevitable rather than exceptional, and as a result *Coatings* is something of a curate's egg. The fact that its lousy parts are suffused with Gilbert's own distinctive tangy odour of musical and social decay is neither here not there, some of this album still stinks. This might be due to the Wire Mail Order label's obsessive desire to release every last note played by the group, but it also owes something to a lack of editorial self-control that came over them in the late 80s, from whence the bulk of this material was drawn. Subsequent remixings rarely do anything to enhance it.

Opening with "Ambulance Chasers", here in its original form, you might not get that impression. Sure, it's stentorian, sledgehammer, ritualistic pop-by-numbers, but with a battery of guitars and devices suggesting a kind of street disturbance in the background, it proves a winner. Unfortunately, the own-goals that follow don't make happy listening, save for fans of mid-80s Muzak for Cult Studs students. The proto-Ambient, mellotron flourishing "It's A Boy" (spookily prophesying Trance) and the piranha-like ferocity of "Drill"'s sequencer are heroic attempts to make up lost ground. Disc two is

taken up by a 19 minute reworking of "Ambitious" Here, the group utilises a panoramic tonal landscape which allows their natural textural talent to shine through The implacable hooliganism of truculent samples and old-style boldness of utterance (the striking of metal never sounded so ambiguous a sound as on a Wire record) makes up for the brevity of the disc as a whole

Gilbert's own trajectory remains stubbornly cussed with the thoroughly miserable but not mentless *In Esse* The title, plucked from the obscurity of inheritance law, is as inscrutable as the music within But after 45 minutes of feedback and static, albeit mixed and miked aggressively and ingeniously on "Soli", there's the inescapable suspicion that Gilbert is merely giving his public what they think they want. While this is self-evidently the work of someone who knows his musical experimentation from his music excruciation (there's a strange childlike curiosity to the sheer range of timbral exploration in all three dimensions), this is too often less probing the depths than treading water

PAUL STUMP

The XIII Ghosts
Legend Of The Blood Yeti
INFINITE CHUG 5 CD

Beresford/Palmer/ Stagner/Turner
Short In The UK
INCUS CD27 CD

Among the highlights of Company Week 1988 were the appearances of reedsman Alex Ward, then aged 14 Even at that age he had a prodigious technique, but it was not his manual and mandible dexterity that impressed so much as the substance and inventiveness of his improvising, the assurance and maturity with which he contributed to the group music making Ward's youth neither begged nor received special consideration, and he rose impressively to the challenge of interacting with established masters of Improv, including Company facilitator Derek Bailey

In 1991 he and Steve Noble cut *Ya Boo Reel And Rumble* for Bailey's Incus label, which amply fulfilled the promise of the Company concerts He still keeps the free improvisation faith, but XIII Ghosts, the group in which he is partnered by Benjamin (Switch) Herve on Hammond B-3 and electronics, introduce elements from other traditions, many dredged from the depths of folk-nightmares and the subconscious.

Legend Of The Blood Yeti developed from a festival to which Thurston Moore was asked to contribute by a mysterious sponsor The venue was a church in the northern Norwegian mountains. It turned out that the festival was to comprise no one except the acts Moore assembled — Sonic Youth, Bailey, XIII Ghosts, and Andrew Clare from Small Things — every night for a week. The music made during the last concert was so affecting that the participants seem to have unnerved themselves When the DAT tape was stolen, most of the musicians were reluctant to recreate it, wary, perhaps, of re-conjuring something they had already exorcised Eventually Bailey, Clare and Moore were inveigled into the studio to cut this CD alongside Ward and Herve Even in what Herve regards as a pale reconstruction, there is a haunted, restless, unsettling quality to the music What's really spooky are the 63 seconds of blank groove at the end of track eight honest, guys, reviewers do play CDs right through

More great moments at Company BB arose from matching Dennis Palmer with Steve Beresford, who triumphantly demonstrated that synthesizers have potential way beyond their common role as cheeky impersonators of keyboards. *Short* also features Bob Stagner (who sometimes partners Palmer in The Shaking Ray Levis) It is exuberant, inventive, exhilarating and, Goddamn it, fun It features many of your non-singalong favourites like "The Pencil — A History" and "Bulldog Eating A Wasp" If we gave stars this would get more than four

BARRY WITHERDEN

Frank Zappa
200 Motels
RYKODISC RCD 10513/14 2CD

Zappa's original soundtrack for *200 Motels*, his only commercially released movie, remains something of a curiosity When it was first released in 1971, it was the kind of venture which only slobbering, diehard fans could be bothered getting to grips with 26 years later and the song remains the same This epic fable of how it feels to be endlessly on the road in a rock group, together with all the excess baggage that such an experience inevitably attracts (drugs, groupies, hostile rednecks, etc), includes Ringo Starr as Zappa's double, Keith Moon as a harp playing nun, Ringo's chauffeur Martin Lickert as bass player Jeff Simmons (who departed The Mothers Of Invention before shooting began), Motorhead Sherwood as an industrial vacuum cleaner, and a ballet troupe of newts

Zappa's (mostly live) score is equally eccentric, a loosely strung combination of rock, opera and contemporary classical that teams his later Mothers Of Invention group (featuring ex-Turtles vocalists Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan) with the baffled sounding Royal Philharmonic Orchestra The result is a messy, but entertaining enough trawl through the various musical passions and obscure obsessions of its creator, many of which had already been aired more successfully on earlier records (Compare the chaos going on here to the compositional genius that resonates from the grooves of *Lumpy Gravy*, for example, where Zappa's Laurel Canyon freak circus sounds entirely in sync with the orchestral arrangements that push through and weave round the mumblings about *"pigs and ponies"*)

On *200 Motels* the humour is less intimate and less surreal, the orchestra sounds bored, and The Mothers have been reduced to playing Zappa's accursed 'Comedy Music' instead of being let loose and allowed to run free

For all its faults, however, there is enough to be enjoyed here to make *200 Motels* worth checking out 25 years on The added promo radio spots and the grandiose "Strictly Genteel" finale — which went on to become a regular feature in concert performances of Zappa's music — are worth salvaging from the wreckage, at least.

EDWIN POUNCEY

John Zorn
The Parachute Years 1977-1980
TZADIK TZ7316 7CD

Writing about the ten CD collection of "tar pit relics" that made up *The Lowest Form Of Music: The Los Angeles Free Music Society 1973-1994* in *The Wire* 149, David Toop described how he could "catch the echoes of a very familiar struggle a thousand different musics buzzing in the head every level of technology, familiar and invented the awareness of unwelcome orthodoxies silting up every burst of inspiration" I'd like to say that I've been carrying this line around in my head for the last year, but no I went looking for *anything* that had been written about the LAFMS box, the only recent corollary I can come up with to this seven CD collection of the recordings John Zorn made for avant-rockabilly-bebop satyr/guitarist Eugene Chadbourne's Parachute label at the end of the 70s. Both sets bring together musics which might be called legendary, or at least long-forgotten, had they been *known* in the first place, both do so with an obsessive attention to detail in the packaging and presentation, and both remind us — at a time when it feels as though we all need reminding, daily — that some music can, has and still *does* exist beyond the 'entertainment' industry's need to reduce any piece of art to the level of 'product', not to mention the media's need to perceive it as an element of the zeitgeist, and, let's be honest, the listeners' need to have things handed to them on plate In any case, Toop's description of The LAFMS box could very easily be transposed to the music here

The four pieces — "Lacrosse", "Hockey", "Archery" and "Pool" — represent Zorn's first self-produced recordings, each originally released in limited editions of 1000 and distributed via Carla Bley and Mike Mantler's recently launched New Music Distribution Service. Out of the pages of sleevenotes — some written for the original packages, others written specifically for this set, either by Zorn or one of the many participants — one line, from the original sleevenotes to "Pool", elucidates this work more than any other "My concern is not so much with how things SOUND, as with how they WORK," writes Zorn

All these pieces were conceived at a point when Zorn was obsessed with finding ways to marry his twin loves of pure improvisation and highly structured composition He had, as he points out in a newly-written introduction to the entire set, been developing ways to bring these warring tendencies together since 1974, using the underlying theories and strategies of specific 'games' In retrospect, he believes 1977's "Lacrosse" to be a breakthrough This set features two versions by very different groups a sextet of Zorn, electronics manipulator Mark Abbott, violinists Polly Bradfield and LaDonna Smith, guitarists Chadbourne and Davey Williams, and a quartet of Zorn, Chadbourne, guitarist Henry Kaiser and soprano saxophonist Bruce Ackley The differences between the groups' interpretations of Zorn's instructions are as instructive as they are bewildering, and they hold for all of the music gathered in this box. In fact the most immediate observation is that there is no discernible relationship between them, at all Each proceeds with its own sequence of apparently random moments, juxtaposing discreet sound events, each packed with incident We know that the combination of players and much of *how*, if not exactly *what*, they play has been predetermined by Zorn along exact lines, but I certainly am not conscious of this while listening

I vividly recall seeing Zorn performing at Company Week in 1991 in a quartet with Derek Bailey, Pat Thomas and Buckethead This was pure Improv, of course, nonetheless, Zorn seemed to create some structure, spontaneously, out of everyone else's playing, in some act of pre-technological real-time editing While these pieces approach the music from the other direction, the structure coming first, they communicate the same urgent need to render form from chaos.

All seven of these CDs contain some awesome musicianship, both individual and collective, from players who would together define New York's vital early 80s alternative avant garde Anthony Coleman, Tom Cora, Wayne Horvitz, Kramer, Bill Laswell, Bob Ostertag, David Moss, Charles K Noyes, as well as those already mentioned The musical incidents and collisions are naturally way too numerous to metion, but I have to single out Eugene Chadbourne, whose playing throughout is astounding Much of what Chadbourne has done since, if always technically mesmerising, has often had its tongue too firmly in its cheek for my liking, but here he performs with absolute commitment and hellish abandon a revelation

All of which barely begins to scratch the surface of these seven CDs. In the short term, this set may well receive the same scant attention as all Zorn's self-archiving projects, but in time it will be seen as an essential piece of a puzzle which in itself is one of this century's most significant bodies of musical work.

SIMON HOPKINS

in brief critical beats

Reviewed by **Peter Shapiro** and **Rob Young**

Si Begg Working On The Frontline EP MOSQUITO MSQ 010 12"
Although he has the same smartass tendencies (particularly in his Cabbage Boy guise) as the too-clever-by-half drill 'n' bass brigade, Si Begg has enough sense to temper his eccentricities with a commitment to the groove, especially on this Techno excursion for Cristian Vogel's Mosquito label. On "Live Push" he manages to work some funk into Squarepusher's iron maiden of a rhythm, while "Weird Spirit Control" is a masterpiece of melodic drum programming that features an overriding stormtrooper momentum, some snare rolls and a chorus of Latinate percussion fills. He may not generate a thermonuclear sweat, but anyone willing to shake their ass almost as hard as they think will always have a spot on my dancefloor. *(PS)*

Cyclops 4000 Macroscope
ULTIMATE DILEMMA UDR 013 12"
Simultaneously a step forward and giant leap backwards for New York HipHop. By turning mouthfuls of verbiage like *"indiscriminate use of antibiotics"* into the components of a freaky, freaky flow, Cyclops 4000 (aka Sir Menelik) pulls off the same feat that Melle Mel managed when he made *"sacrophiliac"* sound dope. But what on earth were he and Roc Raider (of X-Men fame) thinking when they based the track around some flatulent Chemical Brothers riff? Great scratching though. *(PS)*

Gerhard Deluxxe Spiral Architect EP CRAFT CRAFT 26 12"
Why is it that Mitteleuropeans like Gerhard Potuznik, Patrick Pulsinger, Kerosene, *et al* manage to make something far more listenable than the post-Aphex deluge out of the same base materials? Maybe the continentals' mannered quirkiness, pre-adolescent scatology and general middleclass farting about doesn't grate as much, because they're not afraid of the dancefloor. This is borne out by the latest from Gerhard Potuznik, whose subtle fusion of Sabotage-style Electro and art-Jungle moves and giggles in all the right places. *(PS)*

Fretless AZM Facial Expressions HOLISTIC HOL 16 12"
What else would you expect from a jazzbo exiled on the Isle Of Wight but a strange mixture of Nile Rodgers, Jerry Garcia, St Vincent's Latinaires and The Brand New Heavies? There's a hint of that English eccentric attitude of the spunk jazz crew (like, they survive on cold baked beans straight out of the tin?) but mercifully without its awkward young man, toilet humour vibe. *(PS)*

Morgan Geist The Driving Memoirs CLEAR CLR 437 CD/LP
Morgan Geist & Titonton Duvante Titonton & Morgan EP
PHONO PHONO 15 12"
Typical of a trend that has seen American artists like Glenn Underground and Paul Johnson traverse the House/Techno divide, New Jerseyite Geist fuses House melodicism with Techno's Electro fetish to become one of dance music's premier classicists. *The Driving Memoirs* is a largely downtempo affair that pits suave keyboards against jerky rhythms. It falls more on the Techno side of the fence, but there is, I think, a D-Train sample thrown in as a bone to those few who honour Techno's debt to disco. The EP, meanwhile, has just enough lush textures and robofunk to make both Larry Heard and Juan Atkins proud. *(PS)*

HSO HS Overload EP DROP BEAT SPL 04 12"
Unagi Patrol/Microstudio White Label CARPET BOMB 02 PROMO 12"
By latching onto the big moola makers (The Prodigy, Orbital, Goldie *et al*) as their first wave of Electronica, the US media has made it that extra bit harder for its own underground to flourish. Minuscule labels like Carpet Bomb and Drop Beat offer some early signs of hope, though. Microstudio's lengthy drum 'n' bass odysseys offer teasings on a pulse. Plug-style propulsion meets Mouse On Mars play. Their track is so full of tumbling, alleycat percussion, it sounds like they invited the neighborhood round. Unagi Bomb admit their two burble-break explorations are pisstakes. I hope they'll get over it: the 'drill 'n' bass' they're tilting at was itself intended as a parodic form, and the desperate tail-chasing of this music is already practically terminal.

The other good thing about US based Junglists is they're mercifully free of the kind of stylistic obligations (to be 'dark', 'scientific', etc) that can obsess and occasionally paralyse the London scene. Which leads to the kind of music HSO make: elements from most chapters in the Jungle songbook coupled with a keen sense of development and a Photekian sensitivity to beat-weight. *(RY)*

DJ Krust Warhead/Check Dis Out V RECORDINGS V025 12"
Even in Jungle's proliferating landfill, there are dead ends, and with "Warhead" Krust sounds like he's run up against his. The reductiveness of two-step doesn't give you a lot to go on. "Warhead" sounds disarmed: there's a fudgy descending bass motif, and the trogging march rhythm is garnished with extra breaks in a manner that suggests a petulant child toying with its dinner, and that's it. "Check Dis Out"'s vocal refrain exhorts you to marvel at skills that just don't amass into anything spectacular. Where someone might hear elegant simplicity in "Warhead", this listener hears only a gnawing emptiness. *(RY)*

Optical Moving 808s/High Tek Dreams PROTOTYPE PRO 009 12"
With jittery, skitting, skidding 808 beats and fast synth wooshes, "Moving 808s" sounds a bit like *Trans-Europe Express* breaking up upon re-entry. Never thought Kraftwerk could use a fuel injection. The flip is a more tuneful, more rhythmic rendition of Ed Rush's *Tetsuo* groove. *(PS)*

Pellucid "Edison"/"Tape Yr TV"
BUG GIRL SOUND BGS 1202 12"
Perhaps the wide open spaces that traditionally fire North American art are working to Techno's disadvantage in that country: somehow Highway Five or Ocean Drive haevn't provided the rings of energy that the M25 was for UK rave. But check the titles of Vancouver's Pellucid, interlocking with the American history of electricity, reclaiming Chain Reaction's kaleidoscopic synth textures, they program in a few funky flaws and set out on a Thrust speed-mission of their own. With producers like these recaptuning the flow of treadmill Techno, maybe it won't be long before the States produces its *Autobahn*. *(RY)*

DJ Randy vs Lukas Beep CH IT EP INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH IST 022 12"
Amidst all the pounding, 4/4 *Sturm und Drang* you'd expect from Industrial Strength, there are some great snippets of disintegrating beats and falling debris to trip up the steroid boys in their adrenalin trances. The high pitch oscillations of "Riot Sounds" might sound great out of a screaming sound system, but at home they let the side down a bit. Otherwise, this is the sound of collapsing buildings. *(PS)*

Scorpio Trouble/Division 1
V RECORDINGS V 024 12"
If you've been thinking that there ain't been nothing goin' on in drum 'n' bass but paying the rent for the past several months, this won't change your mind. The bass sounds, however, differ from the one that seems to be used on every other record and the drums are funkier than that snapping cardboard rhythm that has been in the ascendant ever since the apotheosis of Alex Reece. Although this DJ hasn't exactly saved my life, there is a nice Indeep sample thrown in for good measure. *(PS)*

UMO Half Price, Full Value PHARMA PHARMA15 12"
Another close encounter with the 'Unidentified Musical Object' that's piloted by those incorrigible German space cadets, Jammin' Unit, Adel Dior and DJ Terrible. A very different prospct from Unit's steaming Techno in Air Liquide, "Half Price, Full Value" is a miniature slaxploitation soundtrack. Pharma's two-bit sampling and nonchalant backbeat science is an aural analogue to heroin cut with with talc: you pays your money, you takes your choice. But "Half Price, Full Value" is a good crack, sped-up HipHop breaks, stoner phone messages and edgy clavinets make for a pleasing drug sequence. *(RY)*

Glenn Underground Presents The SJU Project Future Parables DEFENDER DFD 14 LP
Just like the aquatint school of drum 'n' bass, Deep House is keyboardists' music par excellence (which wouldn't be a problem if any of these guys were the next Bud Powell, of course none of them are). The SJU shows the same love of the clavinet, the same quota of tinkling vibes and the same notion that jazz = Lonnie Liston Smith's *Expansions* album as those 'quality musicians' under the sway of Bukem and his cohorts. But where those smooth mutherfuckers let their beats slide right into their gurgling jacuzzi of 'jazz', GU's smooth muthas let their hi-hats skip and their kick drums tiptoe around the quasi-Rhodes contours. *(PS)*

Various Artists From Beyond Vols 1-4 INTERDIMENSIONAL TRANSMISSIONS IT Nos 4-7 CD/4x12"
An absolutely brilliant set of EPs out of Detroit that aim to reconstruct the Electro groove. *Volume 2* — with Sluts 'N' Strings & 909 (Austria's army of freakazoids in the battle against the Placebo Syndrome), oscilloscope dub from Planet E's Flexitone, Maggotron bottom end from Miami bass cadets Phoenicia, and Khan, the hardest working man in showbiz, rocking the Casbah — is perhaps the best. Other instalments feature those worshippers at the temple of Vince Clarke, Le Car, Motown's mighty cyber-funkateers Will Webb and Keith Tucker, and Synapse, the lonely Techno warriors from New York. Consumer bonus: locked grooves are thoughtfully included at the end of each track. *(PS)* □

in brief global

Reviewed by **Clive Bell**

Martyn Bennett Bothy Culture
RYKODISC RCD 1D381 CD
Scottish-Canadian Martyn Bennett plays classical violin and bagpipes, but the point is he's got a sampler and he's going to wave it in the air like he just don't care. The result is a vigorous cocktail of traditional Gaelic and Glasgow rave. Big romantic Gaelic melodies, beautifully played on pipes, whistles or fiddle, soar over dancefloor grooves. This is surprisingly convincing, largely because Bennett favours a dark sound in which, say, squirts of Acid bass rub up against Middle Eastern influences, as on "Ud The Doudouk". And Bennett's sober grip on the structure keeps things developing throughout. An exhilarating achievement.

Wally Brill The Covenant SIX DEGREES/ISLAND 314 524 422 CD
I suppose it had to happen — we've had African pygmies warbling over French Techno, and an episode of *The Archers* grafted onto a Deep House beat (I made that one up) — and now someone in San Francisco has taken 78 rpm recordings of Jewish cantors (liturgical singers) and programmed some drums and keyboards around them. It's done with care and respect (of course), and there are some fine musicians involved: trumpeter Jim Dvorak and guitarist David Torn. But musically speaking it's a very stupid idea realised in a sentimental manner, and all the 90s drivel contributes nothing to the stark beauty of the original recordings.

David Bullock The Affirmation Modern Gong Rituals KONG LONG CD 005 CD
Should your hi-fi have subwoofers attached, here's plenty for them to work with, as Australian David Bullock wheels out the heavy brigade from the world of gongs. Bullock's work ranges from soundscape installations to out rock groups with very bad names (Kiss My Poodle's Donkey). Here he mixes a dozen gong types with assorted percussion to create dark-toned textures, including an extraordinary seascape ("Inland Sea"). Other pieces are gentle gamelan style excursions, and it's all played live. If a really large gong is your favourite aural massage, Bullock's got your number.

Chelpa Ferro Chelpa Ferro
ROCKIT! UMD 51016 CD
Four crazed Brazilians let loose in a studio to produce a hectic batch of noise/electronic items. Some spirited improvising around loops and effects, and some artistic thrashing of a genial nature. Not much is identifiable soundwise, but one track is definitely rubber balloons imitating whale song. Three of the four group members trained as visual artists, and one (Sergio Mekler) is a top video editor for MTV. Much of the album scores highly for healthy experimental attitude, and the longueurs seem the result of naive fascination with FX gadgets. What happens if I push that button? No! That's the studio bulk dump, if you push that we'll all ... aiieee!

I Nyoman Jayus's Bamboo Ensemble Jegog. The Rhythmic Power Of Bamboo MULTICULTURAL MEDIA MCM 3012 CD
As well as the familiar gamelans of bronze, the Balinese also have orchestras entirely composed of flutes, and here is one made up of bamboo instruments. This Jegog ensemble is built from special bamboo from the mountain forests in eastern Bali, the poorer part of the island, still almost completely off the tourist trail. The music has a sweet, dark tone, but lacks none of the dynamic range and ensemble virtuosity of the bronze gamelans. These tightly played ensemble grooves, like all Balinese music, are performed by farmers and office workers from the village where the gamelan is based. Three traditional pieces and one new composition by the leader — this is a completely 20th century music, where an 'old' piece means one from the first half of this century.

Mara & Jalal Immigri BARBARITY 016 CD
Lashings of echo on the vocals, squelchy keyboards chasing each other around an Arabic flute sample: this is 1997 dub raï from Casablanca, sung by the clear voice of Cheb Mara. I guess they're aiming at the Moroccan charts, and some of it is cheerfully half-baked, but there's a distinct feeling that these are Moroccan musicians playing about in the studio on their own terms, as opposed to getting some clever clogs from Europe or the States to supposedly show them how to produce a record. The sound may be dominated by Japanese keyboards but it's an album with a strong local identity. The fast ones are the best.

Iarla O'Lionaird The Seven Steps To Mercy REAL WORLD CDRW 67 CD
O'Lionaird sings very beautifully and unaccompanied in Gaelic, the sean nos' style he inherited from his grandparents in County Cork. Born in 1964, he made his first recording at the age of seven. He's serious about what he does and quite reasonably doesn't want it diluted, but he wants to collaborate with other musicians. What do you do with people like this? Well, these days you team them up with producer Michael Brook, who comes up with a series of eerie ambiences and drones, largely non-rhythmic, for O'Lionaird to sing over, rather like an eagle soaring over simulated moorland and bog. It's a problematic record — while not as gushingly sentimental as Clannad, it still has the cloying good taste currently dripping from the Real World label. If we're all so bleeding sincere about the music, how about crediting the bagpiper who dominates track seven? But the giveaway is the final track, recorded in 1978. Clearly the 14 year old O'Lionaird had a harder, quirkier approach to his phrasing, which he has since taken steps to iron out.

Orchestre National De Barbes En Concert TAJMAAT/VIRGIN 8440092 CD
A big North African party of an album, well produced at a live recording session in Paris. In fact Barbes is a neighbourhood of African exiles at the foot of the Sacré Coeur in Paris, and this 13 piece outfit is the project of Algerian and Moroccan exiles who have fetched up there, notably singer Larbi Dida, founder member of rock-raï group Raina Raï. The large-scale pop concert style clearly aims to keep European fans of World Music happily dancing, but the music is well mannaded in a sauce of authentic Algerian talent. And yes, there are synth solos.

Radio Tarifa Temporal WORLD CIRCUIT WCD 048 CD
An antidote to the flatulent ranting of The Gypsy Kings, Radio Tarifa are a flamenco/Arabic/medieval group from Spain, complete with flamenco dancer and singer. This is the more introverted follow-up to their acclaimed *Rumba Argelina*. From traditional Andalucian melodies to a 12th century French processional, the key is subtlety: hoarse flutes, oboes and Arabic lutes flickering over intense, quiet grooves from hand-held drums and percussion. It's not a big commercial sound but one with a wide space for the group's musicality to play in. Highly enjoyable.

David Rothenberg Unamuno NEW TONE 2175D 7006 CD
New York-based Rothenberg is a good clarinettist, with an attractive sound and an ability to understate his playing (cf Jimmy Giuffre). But on the evidence of this album, his skill on the instrument is not yet matched by a facility to organise pieces of music. Plenty of interesting ideas in these 16 numbers: Rothenberg busks along with walruses and the cracking of Arctic ice, guitarist Amit Chatterjee drops by for a track, Doug Quin and Chris Watson contribute four natural soundscapes, and a couple of drum machines are cranked up. But it all feels a bit, you know, insubstantial, and the dreaded Jazz Noodling Monster rears his ugly head too often. Perhaps a touch of Giuffre's iron discipline in the velvet glove is required.

Various Artists The Discoteca Collection: Missao De Pesquisas Folcloricas RYKODISC RCD 1D4D3 CD
Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, along with the Library Of Congress's 'Endangered Music' Project, has curated this collection of 1938 field recordings from North East Brazil. The aim of the original recordists was to set up an archive of musical folklore as a source for the nationalist composers of the day, so that the folk music could be transformed into art music. The tracks are almost all vocal chants or songs accompanying ritual or social dancing. The album looks intriguing but doesn't deliver, as most of the material is musically unremarkable, like dusty exhibits in a museum shorn of their context. An exception is a dark lament sung over a menacing berimbau (one-string musical bow).

Various Artists Madagascar Awakening The Spirits MULTICULTURAL MEDIA MCM 3011 CD
Another fine set of field recordings from the Vermont-based Multicultural Media label. Infectiously rhythmic music from the remote south western corner of Madagascar, where trance rituals of spirit possession and healing, far from dying out, are re-emerging at all social levels. All this music is firmly based in ceremony, and all played fast in triple time. Exceptional performances on the 'marovany' zither and accordion, and breakneck skiffle from 20 year old 'mandoliny' lute players, who are clearly itching to get their hands on electric guitars. If drum 'n' bass is starting to sound sluggish, lend an ear to these mesmerising showoffs.

Various Artists Utom Summoning The Spirit Music In The T'boli Heartland (Philippines) RYKODISC RCD 10402 CD
Another album with Mickey Hart as executive producer, a beautiful set of recordings of the hunting T'boli people, who live on Mindanao in the Philippines. Exquisitely recorded by Manolete Mora, these lutes, bamboo zithers and gongs seem to glitter like ripples on a stream. The mainly solo musicians, many of whom are women, incorporate mimicry of insects and birds into their playing. Or they are inspired by gongs from a nearby village, or by children playing to scare birds from the rice fields. The whole thing is a demonstration of people playing a music explicitly influenced by their immediate environment. The music tends to work with repeated loops of melodic and rhythmic elements, as if the T'boli have been listening to Steve Reich albums. Or could it be the other way around? □

in brief jazz

Reviewed by **Andy Hamilton**

Arild Andersen Hyperborean ECM 1631 CD

Jack DeJohnette Oneness ECM 1637 CD

According to the Greeks, it says here, "The northern portion of the earth was inhabited by a happy race called the Hyperboreans, dwelling in everlasting bliss and spring" Now it's inhabited by gloomy Nordic peoples who make grey recordings for the ECM label Though no old-time Hyperboreans are featured, *Hyperborean* does have the relative novelty of pleasant string quartet arrangements behind the jazz quintet. But saxist Tore Brunborg is a Jan Garbarek soundalike whose efforts pall, despite excellent Kenneth Knudsen on keyboards and Arild Andersen on bass. Compared to fine recent ECM albums by Tomasz Stanko, Joe Manen and Marilyn Crispell, *Hyperborean* is a throwback.

Despite being implicated in Keith Jarrett's version of 'back to basics', the Standards Trio, Jack DeJohnette has always been adventurous on his own dates, and his timekeeping is peerless *Oneness* belongs to a series of trio or quartet albums involving drummer/pianist Michael Cain Percussionist Don Alias and guitarist Jerome Harris play uncharacteristically understated roles, but despite the evident empathy, the music meanders without resolution Spare, impressionistic and too uneventful for this listener

Henning Berg/John Taylor Tango & Company JAZZHAUSMUSIK JHM 85 CD

Roger Miller/Larry Dertsch The Binary System Live At The Idea Room SST 349 CD

After chess playing computers, musically improvising computers. To a duo Improv session with British pianist John Taylor, trombonist Henning Berg brought along his friend Tango Tango has a program that allows the computer to listen to the duo partners, analyse what it hears, and improvise reactions in real-time that are produced on MIDI synthesizers and a remote-controlled grand piano The result is a mostly gentle sounding but far from enervating set of pieces. John Taylor may not be the most emotionally compelling improvisor, but these sensitive interactions with Henning Berg, amplified by Tango, provoke some of his best work of recent years.

Boston-based pianist Roger Miller's duo with drummer Larry Dertsch remains all too human They recorded a set of short pieces, some for prepared piano, live at the Idea Room, a club in Long Beach California The very rhythmic Cage and Cowell influenced pieces have some jazz and tango input (the dance, not the computer) The result might have appealed but for the relentless loud timekeeping — that's about all it is — of Dertsch, especially on bass drum Not awesome, just crass and redundant, the result is almost impossible to listen to

Theo Bleckmann & Ben Monder No Boat SONGLINES SGL 1516 CD

The first vocal release by the Canadian label with an impressive reputation For much of the disc, Theo Bleckmann's voice, sometimes multiplied by live electronics, forms an instrumental counterpoint to Ben Monder's guitar His way with standards — "Out Of This World" and "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye" — is predictably oblique, the delivery rich and thick. Elsewhere the singing is often falsetto and full of vocalising effects — panting, puffing, whining, even yodelling. His dexterity makes him the thinking person's Bobby McFerrin, but Bleckmann's vocal approach is quite original Monder's guitar may be less so, with a debt to Bill Frisell's trademark dynamics Impressionistic textures contrast with something more muscular, and Jim Black's magnificent drumming, plus Skuli Sverrisson on electric bass, round out the group sound An impressive release

John Wolf Brennan Moskau-Petuschki/Felix-Szenen LEO LAB D34 CD

The work of this Irish composer and pianist, now living in Switzerland, runs at a very oblique angle to any jazz mainstream The modal certainties and simple lyricism of folk tradition rescue his music from New Age blandness. The music here, written for two plays, features small groups with violin, French horn and bass, and Brennan on piano *Moskau-Petuschki* is a tale of a wandering alcoholic by Wenedict Jerofejew Brennan's music is bleakly effective, circling round a repeating set of chords with an often maniacal obsessiveness, its bouncy Minimalist rhythms removed from their usual anodyne context. The music for *Felix-Szenen*, a set of tales by early 20th century Swiss writer Robert Walser, is less spare, with a more relaxed feel Difficult to categorise, hard to forget

Fizzè/'Dizzi' Rieder Kulu Hatha Mamnua/Manoeuvres D'Automne MENSCH AGR 008 CD

A compilation from two 80s albums by Fizzè and 'Dizzi', with additional tracks presumably from the same sessions The names I've not come across before, the label looks to be German-Swiss. Some tracks have a strong Middle Eastern or Arabic flavour, others have African tuned percussion with a taste of jazzy sax. Distorted extracts from Beethoven piano sonatas are set next to industrial soundscapes. "Animist" samples an anonymous throat singer while conjuring Theremin-like sounds. "Odessa" uses "heteroclite objects", percussion and synthesizer to produce an eerie drone and a totally haunting effect — despite the melodic nature of the music. Totally hypnotic and captivating

Bill Horist Soylent Radio UNIT CIRCLE UC 045 CD

Seattle-based Horist is a highly versatile guitarist whose credits include noise and rock groups, improv and solo projects, plus film composing *Soylent Radio* features improvised guitar solos and duets with Rich Hinklin (Moog, fuzz keybass), Eveline Muller (sharp metal objects) and Troy Swanson (corpus collosom, electronics) — the last two from Horist's noise quartet Fuselage Some of these instruments are obscure — the corpus collosom is the bundle of nerve connections between the two hemispheres of the brain, and what Troy Swanson is doing with it I can't imagine The title track is solo, an undulating noisescape which moves into gentler, more atmospheric territory and concludes with what sounds like the kora On the more percussive "Clowder", Eveline Muller gets out her "sharp objects", producing whining guitar-like effects and bell sounds Recommended

Ove Johansson In A Different World LJ RECORDS LJ S214 CD

Swedish saxophonist Johansson is not in the reference books, but — judging by his photograph — he's been on the scene a while His very strong, hard edged sax playing makes it a puzzle that he's not better known Here he also plays EWI (electronic wind instrument — a synthesizer with saxophone mouthpiece) and other synthesizers. From the goblinesque "Free Form" to the scurrying, uptempo "Another Twelve", *In A Different World* features a varied set of short pieces whose inventiveness doesn't pall

Moscow Composers Orchestra Let Peremsky Dream LEO LAB 035 CD

Ganelin Trio Ancora Da Capo LEO LR 108 CD

The third CD by The Moscow Composers Orchestra on Leo, *Let Peremksy Dream* is a live recording from the Unsung Music Festival at Queen Elizabeth Hall last year The group is led by pianist Vladimir Miller, and includes Vladimir Tarasov of The Ganelin Trio on drums. This is fragmentary, episodic music, with the most straight-ahead big band jazz on the final, long track "Brief Meditation", though broken up by more ponderous atonal passages. Though I love the Tibetan throat-singers, Sainkho Namchylak is a Tuvan and an acquired taste

Ancora Da Capo (Once More From The Beginning) features heroic free jazz from the end of the Brezhnev era by The Ganelin Trio The CD is a reissue of two LPs of concerts in Leningrad and West Berlin in 1980 On the first especially the sound is boxy and Vyacheslav Ganelin's piano rather jangly The exposure this unswinging, explosive music received in the West — unique for free jazz — must be down in large part to its political implications Both albums are a tough and demanding listen

Herbie Nichols The Complete Blue Note Recordings BLUE NOTE 72438 5935220 3CD

Jazz as art music and jazz as repertory both have a claim on the work of the obscure but very fine pianist and composer Herbie Nichols, who died in 1963 aged 44 Blue Note have now reissued this set, previously on Mosaic, on three CDs Nichols's affinities with Thelonious Monk's acidulated dissonance and stride piano roots are often remarked But his music also looks forward to Cecil Taylor, whose early efforts similarly combined angular, highly dissonant structures with conventional swing rhythm. Nichols's improvisations are more delicate, spidery even But the combination, both in Nichols and Taylor, has a transitional feel Titles are quirky too — such as "Amoeba's Dance" and "Cro-Magnon Nights" Jazz musicians from Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd — a student of Nichols — to Gen Allen have reworked the pianist's music. Essential recordings of modern jazz.

Gary Thomas Found On Sordid Streets WINTER & WINTER 910 002 CD

Various Artists Monk To Bach WINTER & WINTER 910 010 CD SINGLE

Thomas is another JMT artist with a home on its successor label Winter & Winter On *Found* he makes fairly desultory connections between hard bop and rap, with artists Pork Chop and No Name on some tracks. Hammond organ appeared on the earlier *Exile's Gate* but here it's George Colligan who tackles the monster Paul Bollenback contributes electric guitar The straight-ahead jazz tracks are the strongest If he isn't making great advances on earlier efforts, Thomas's thick, dark playing makes him one of the more successful proponents of post-Coltrane chromaticism

Monk To Bach is a useful low-price sampler of Winter & Winter's recent releases, from both its jazz and classical series It ranges from Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band with a Rodgers and Hart tribute — "Blue Room" — to Bach Cello Suites, via Astor Piazzolla and Un Caine/Gustav Mahler's *Primal Light* (see review in Soundcheck) □

in brief out rock

Reviewed by **Tom Ridge**

The American Analog Set Late One Sunday & The Following Morning DARLA DRL 048 CD/12"
Low Songs For A Dead Pilot KRANKY KRANK 021 CD/LP
The press release describes The American Analog Set as "slowcore", but in fact *Late One Sunday* is quite a sprightly piece of Minimalism, the drums playing out a more uptight "Funky Drummer" variation while layers of keyboard and guitar build subtly in waves of Ambient noise at some length The second of these two tracks, "The Following Morning", lays the same emphasis on repetition but the percussion is a brushed murmur and electronic chimes give it an air of blissed out tranquillity The Darla label is gathering a formidable roster of groups with broadly similar approaches, where Ambient trancerock collides with neo-psychedelia

Speed, or lack of it, has been a defining quality of Low's output to date Their first release for the Kranky label is also their first stab at home recording This has brought about some obvious changes the overall mix is far less measured, with smothered vocals and distorted bass, the pairing of Ambient and angular noise sometimes verges on plain antagonistic, and the pace is even slower Previously Low's songs would slowly unfold into a kind of slow motion beauty, but here they crawl under an oppressive weight.

The Bad Examples The River, The Night, The Moon, Temptation And You ATATAK WR 70 CD
The Lonesome Organist Collector Of Cactus Echo Bags THRILL JOCKEY THRILL 044 CD
Both these releases tread a fine line between eccentricity and pastiche German Exoticists The Bad Examples play out their kitsch Electronica with smooth, sugary, 60s flavoured themes, and slightly moodier cocktail stuff Inoffensive at best, you can either switch into Easy Listening mode and let it wash over you, or, more simply, switch it off

The Lonesome Organist should have 'wacky' tattooed on his forehead, so clumsily obvious is his hyperactive mutation of traditional musical forms From manic electronic polkas to demented rockabilly yodelling, it's all here It would be nice to celebrate this as the work of a demented auteur, but it's more a predictable trawl through already well traversed territory

Black Swan Network The Late Music CAMERA OBSCURA CAM 003 CD
Stars Of The Lid Gravitational Pull Vs The Desire For An Aquatic Life KRANKY KRANK 020 CD
Olivia Tremor Control spin-off Black Swan Network discard all conventional notions of structure and plunge into an unmapped Ambient world of bubbling analogue noises, low machine hum and occasional voice samples Much of it has a sort of queasiness, with lurching tape speeds and loud frequency interference It feels designed to provoke rather than soothe Hardcore Ambient perhaps?

Stars Of The Lid, though similarly exploring rhythm-free zones, allow their 'music' to unfold gradually, in immense waves of sound This reissue of a 1996 vinyl-only release is another masterful collection of fluid, mesmerising sound experiments. There is nothing piecemeal or overtly angular in these compositions — they have a remarkable, sustained quality, both glacial and monumental

Chessie Signal Series DROP BEAT SPL 05 CD/LP
The Marinernine A Little Something From The Weathervane's Perspective MINER ST RECORDINGS MSR 005 CD
Chessie is multi-instrumentalist Stephen Gardner who uses looped beats as a starting point for a series of instrumental tracks, which integrate 'live' and electronic elements with largely engaging results Some of the more extreme, distorted material is reminiscent of Third Eye Foundation, where bass-heavy rhythms expand into immense walls of noise The layering of conflicting rhythms is also intriguing, whereby they're compressed into unexpected structures to yield sometimes surprisingly serene results.

The Marinernine — a spin-off project by Brian McTear and Jason Knight of The Azusa Plane — attempt to forge complementary live tracks on top of found Ambient noise, producing dense rhythmic structures which occasionally lock into a groove, or clatter sloppily around low frequency machine hums Elsewhere, they use acoustic instruments to produce simple melodies overlaid onto muted electronic white noise Unfortunately, they run out of ideas halfway through, thereafter you get an unremarkable jazz-derived instrumental, a traditional folk song, and, bizarrely, some fuzzy noise pop

Ganger Remix Trilogy SOUL STATIC SOUND SOUL 21 1/21 2/21 3 3x12"s
Laika Almost Sleeping TOO PURE PURE 71 CD/12"
The DJ D and Underdog meddlings on Ganger's triple 12" set represent a more experimental edge in remixing (21 1 and 21 3 respectively) The D mix is a frenzied assault of clipped edits, colliding violently and resolving themselves into a kind of disjointed rhythm The Underdog mix is similarly unnerving, with bouts of stuttering distortion followed by more impressionistic washes of sound The Two Loce Swordsmen effort on the second disc is more linear — a speeded up dub treatment of a propulsive groove The flipside of all thre vinyls features features an etching by each artist — you think I'm going to wreck my stylus on *that?*

Laika's EP begins unpromisingly with a truncated "Almost Sleeping", which butchers the dreamlike groove of the original, but the remaining trio of remixes are rewarding enough "Prairie Dog" is stripped back to a near-naked arrangement of live percussion and keyboards, improving on the album version by removing it from its more strident, contemporary moorings and highlighting its inherent strengths as a song, "Breather" is radically reworked into a relentlessly funky mix with explosive synth noises and sharp beats, and "Shut Off/Curl Up" is slowed down to bass-heavy thuds

Grandaddy Under The Western Freeway BIG CAT ABB 152 CD
The multi-layered dynamics of Mercury Rev and the offbeat sensibilities of Pavement are filtered through a Californian pop ethic to produce an engaging collection of songs which manage to sound sincere without being ponderous or overly earnest. Sometimes they soar, as on "Summer Here Kids", sometimes they go for a more oblique, muddled sound (on the title track) They finish with an attempted epic pop gesture a minimalist keyboard refrain and spluttering guitar solo, growing in authority, only to cut out abruptly followed by a low voice muttering, *"Sorry"* Perfect.

The Iceburn Collective Polar Bear Suite ICEBURN RECORDS ICE 001 CD
Otolithen SOD CUNEIFORM RUNE 97 CD
Iceburn's three lengthy compositions are improvised straight onto DAT without overdubs This impetuous approach yields edgy, thrilling results on the first track, "Solarity", where the jerky rhythms, lurching sax and clarinet recall *Mirror Man*-era Captain Beefheart Its contrasting, constantly shifting textures, made up of sedate guitar picking and honking free jazz soloing, don't let up for some 20 minutes Alas, the subsequent tracks are full of tiresome fragmentary doodling and formulaic hardcore riff-mongering

However, even at their heaviest, they're mild compared to the migraine-inducing Otolithen Though less chaotic than The Iceburn Collective's free-association rock, Otolithen's restlessly changing patterns and tense, compacted arrangements force their music into cramped spaces They're undoubtedly accomplished players, but they're relentlessly punishing to listen to

Juicy Eureka Thinking Up Things And Then Forgetting Them LISSY'S LISS 19 CD
Featuring former Loop bassist Neil Mackay, this album partially revisits his old group's territory, particularly on the opening drone of "Harmonicas 2000" and the trancelike "Fantastic Planet" The overall impression though, is of a sketchbook collection of experiments Even when they can sustain focus, like on the melodic "Cardboard" and the driving "Blind", they still cannot blast away a niggling vagueness, or, indeed, the sense of ideas not fully realised

Alan Licht The Evan Dando Of Noise? CORPUS HERMETICUM HERMES 022 CD
Mostly consisting of fearsome guitar noise, this is challenging improv material from No Wave mainstay Licht (who also plays in the experimental but song-based Run On) "I Hate Gate (Part 3)" is one long, tortuous wave of distortion, "Ambulance Chaser" is evocative of machine tools drilling into some sensitive area (the brain perhaps?) In complete contrast, "West Twenty" features pipe organ played in St Peter's Church, NYC, with avant garde clarinet accompaniment "Lonesome Valley" is a baffling combination of high octane hillbilly guitar and a field recording of a South Carolina hollering competition After such crazed diversions, the return to frenzied guitar pummelling on the closing "For Jojo" is almost a relief

Long Fin Killie Amelia TOO PURE PURE 74 CD/LP
Mogwai Young Team CHEMIKAL UNDERGROUND CHEM 018 CD
The experimental flipside to the now waning wave of UK pop triumphalism is well illustrated by these two Scotland-based groups Long Fin Killie sound like none of their contemporaries Their music is characterised by fluid but unpredictable rhythms, vocals which remain intense even at a near-whisper, and a willingness to be dramatic without exhuming outmoded rock stances If this emphasis on texture and theatricality occasionally leads to Long Fin Killie overreaching themselves, the rewards usually justify the risk.

Working around linear rhythms, and incorporating oscillating noise and ghostly voice samples, Mogwai produce some of the most gutsy experimental guitar music since Sonic Youth's heyday This is not to say that they lack subtlety On the contrary, their taut dynamics emphasise both the brutality and fragility of their music. It's refreshingly direct, but never over-simplified □

the compiler

Electronica compilations reviewed by **Rob Young**

Let's get this straight. Have we just had the digital millennium, or is it the one to come? ***Digital Millennium*** (GPR DCD 1B 2CD) marks the return of Wayne Archbold's troubled GPR label, which launched bleep-Techno acts like The Black Dog, Mark Broom, Germ and Russ Gabriel. But if you spend two years in the pits, expect to get lapped a few times: there's neither the rigour nor sense of eternal continuity that the Germans are doing so well. For chapter and verse, consult ***Harvest In Technicolor*** (Harvest 7243 B 21539 CD), a ravishing collection on the German EMI offshoot that's been colonised by the Cologne Electro Bunker posse (Air Liquide, The Bionaut, Frank Heiss, UMO *et al*). But the new deutsche Welle isn't all keenly articulated circuitry. Where British post-Trance Electronica still can't avoid sounding like so much bubbly Radox, ***Riot Zone*** (Digital Hardcore Recordings DHR 1D CD) and ***Position Chrome*** (Force Inc/Chrome EFA B136B CD/2LP) are a quick wash and brush-up with sodium soap. Driven by passion and a riveting sense of self-belief, the blast zone carved out by Alec Empire, ECBOR and Shizuo (on DHR), and Panacea, his alter ego Problem Child and Heinrich at Hart (on Chrome) is opening up a jagged lesion in German Techno discourse. Meanwhile, refugees from alt.rock, Mitteleuropa-Country and red-eye computoid nuttiness are converging on the new alliance formed by labels Kitty-Yo, Kollaps and Payola. Those (few) of you tracking these labels' output via their ultra-expensive vinyl imports will find solace in ***Einigen Wir Uns Auf Die Zukunft*** (Indigo 7357 CD): a tasty *Vorspeise* selection featuring Snowe, Tarwater, Console, Laub, Tied & Tickled Trio. The same could be said of ***Industrialsamplecoregouchbeat*** (Mille Plateaux MPCD 41 CD), compiled by Trash, a Brighton based collective headed up by Cristian Vogel, who's practically the UK's ambassador for user-unfriendly Techno at this point. With Mille Plateaux's PoMo theoretical circuits approaching meltdown, the music of Vogel's No Future stable (including Spymania's Hardy and Milky Boy, plus Jamie Lidell and Si Begg, all represented here) stutters towards terminal lockdown, forward-flow subsumed in channel-hopping collage, virus-hit system software and corrupted samples.

Worm Interface's latest grab bag of bend-it shape-it Electronica, ***Disco Moonlight*** (Worm Interface WI D11 CD), is relatively easier to chew on — surprising, given that half of it sounds like amplified indigestion (isn't it time to dispense with *that* 5quarepushing, farty eardrum-buzzin' rhythmic tic?). It's the unknowns who really shine here, especially Rook Valard's incredible "Stochast", with its glinting cymbal-grids swarming across the sound-picture. The disc also contains Farmers Manual's dysfunctional "Nomad 6D", plus unusually feisty offerings from Freeform, Dunderhead and Asphere. Meanwhile, rumours that David Kristian has junked his his entire rhythmic sample collection appear confirmed by "Celesta", a brooding dustcloud of atmospherica that's only out-droned by Tom Jenkinson's isolationist closer, "System 4v7".

Bento Box (Caipirinha Productions CAI 2004 2 CD) lays a smokescreen of fluffy tracks (by Visit Venus, The Egg and Little Aida) camouflaging a more heated debate going on at the end — between DJ Vadim, Cabbageboy and Manc upsetters Boards Of Canada — but the event horizon remains relatively flat. A charge which could equally be laid at three Scandinavian collections currently doing the rounds. ***Arctic Circles — A Selection Of Sub-Zero Soundscapes*** (Beatservice BSCD015 CD), ***Boredom Is Deep And Mysterious*** (April APR023 CD), and ***Det Norske Hus*** (Dbut Records NDBUT D1 CD). The first two can be safely ignored — fiddly, stunted rhythms and unsalted melodies abound — but the third is worth tracking down (its lurid yellow sleeve ensures it'll get noticed in the snow). These Norwegian tracks span gritty Techno (Nood), Orang-ish groove (Palace Of Pleasure) and even laid-back Norwegian rap (Pen Jakke). With injections from post-Industrial fixtures Origami Teknika and glaciated Ambient types Sketch, this is music thriving in spite of the midnight sun. □

Label distributors & contacts

Contact addresses are given for labels without named UK distributors. Labels not named here should be available from specialist retailers such as Depth Charge, Piccadilly, Rough Trade, These, etc. In emergencies, contact likely distributors such as Cargo, Greyhound, Harmonia Mundi, Impetus, Kudos, Pinnacle, ReR, SRD, These, Vital, etc. *NB labels and distributors: if you spot an incorrect or missing listing in this column, please contact* The Wire *pronto*

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Neurofunk discography *(from page 30)*

Andy C & Shimon "Mutation"/"Genetix" (Ram) **Arcon 2** *The Beckoning* (Reinforced) **John B** *Visions* (New Identity/Formation) **Boymerang** *Balance Of The Force* (Regal) **Codename John** "The Warning"/"Structure Of Red" (Metalheadz) **Cyborgz** "Interface" (Smooth) **Decoder** "Tension" (Elementz) **Krust** "Genetic Manipulation EP" (Full Cycle) **Jonny L** "Piper (Groovender Remix)"/"Obedience" (XL), *Sawtooth* (XL) **Matrix** "Double Vision"/"Sedation" (Metro) **Nasty Habits** "Shadow Boxing Remix"/"March" (31 Records) **Optical** "To Shape The Future"/"Raging Calm" (Metalheadz) **Optical/Ed Rush/Fierce** "The End EP" (31 Records) **Optical/Ed Rush** "Funktion"/"Naked Lunch" (V) **Optical/Matrix** "Data Life EP" (Positiva/Addictive) **Procedure 769** "Lethal Dosage" (Reinforced) **Skynet** "Severe Trauma"/"Telemetry" (Audio Blueprint) **The Sonar Circle** "Fresh"/"Checkmate" (Reinforced) **Doc Scott** "Swarm" (Metalheadz) **Source Direct** "Two Masks"/"Black Domina" (Science) **DJ Swift** "Load"/"Soul" (True Playaz) **Trace/Nico** "Cells"/"Copies" (No U Turn) **Various** *Groovender Presents The Prototype Years* (Prototype/Columbia)

multi media

Rob Young meets **Walter Fabeck**, inventor of the Chromasone

Among the 20th century's great biodiversity of newly minted instruments, few survive (see the tale of Oskar Sala and his Trautonium, *The Wire* 165) With rapid technological advances causing even more rapid extinctions, most new devices never reach standardisation, let alone the prospect of a player mastering the instrument Yet for all that, the new century seems certain to witness an agglomeration of instruments like the Chromasone Dreamt up and built by British keyboardist and composer Walter Fabeck, with the aid of designer Tim Gravestock and resources from Amsterdam's STEIM Institute, the art deco-meets-*Star Wars* design of this rotating blade takes the space-sensor concept of the Theremin into the realm of MIDI, to the point where comparisons become useless.

"I got the idea from watching [Canadian pianist] Glenn Gould play," explains Fabeck, a couple of weeks after a coruscating performance at October's Sprawl Compass event, where he duetted with his former pupil Jono Podmore, aka drum 'n' bass artist Kumo "I noticed that when Gould was playing a phrase with one hand, his other hand was articulating a phrase structure in a bar I felt there was a lot of redundancy in a piano player's movements — what if you could harness them and feed it back into the music?"

Walter Fabeck (right) with Kumo

How was the problem solved? A Theremin has only two sensors — which in essence register the *x* and *y* co-ordinates of the hands The Chromasone adds a third, *z* dimension, allowing a highly flexible degree of spatial sensitivity Commissioned by STEIM to come up with a new instrumental concept, Fabeck took as the heart of his construction a Sensor-Lab, essentially a small computer which can convert sensor inputs into MIDI, and a pair of Mattel datagloves Information about the position of the hands, and what the fingers are up to at any given moment, are detected by three ultrasound receivers one fixed to one end of the keyboard itself, the second near the base of the instrument, a third placed about two metres away "The most fundamental aspect hit me one evening the way to use this keyboard was to actually rotate and tilt it," Fabeck explains 'Keyboard' is merely a handy term for the eye-catching, LED-lit sheet of perspex different sounds are triggered not by touch, but by the position of the hands relative to the sensorbeams The keyboard is effectively a mimetic ruler, with 'keys' marked in dimensions equivalent to a grand piano, enabling the player to find the correct sound instantaneously Resting on a jointed pivot at its fulcrum, it can be turned and banked during play, in full flow, Fabeck looks like he's flying it.

"By moving it around you can preset pitches in relation to the other two fields. So for example, you've got the keyboard split up into different samples, you could have didgendoo at the bottom end and piccolo at the top, and by turning it round one way you emphasise the didgendoo hugely, and the piccolo would be almost inaudible While you are playing you can turn it round and do a crossfade The same thing applies to the tilt — the vertical dimension The closer you are to the ground, the more filter there is."

Switches at one end of the board can trigger rhythms, 'licks', loops and breakbeats, while pedals at floor level allow Fabeck to sustain notes, send instructions to his computer to alter the effects, and toggle through various different functions embedded within switches on his datagloves "There's more to these gloves than meets the eye," he reveals "There are a couple of microswitches on each forefinger, and in combination with the pedals, these buttons have a lot of different functions You can scroll through a list of options, make the left hand send breath-control, pan, volume or modulation" Techno-fetishism aside, the most valuable aspect of the Chromasone is its enhanced capabilities for physical expression "You can grab a note and take it on a journey, without moving the keyboard, because the system's still responsive to where your hand is As long as you've got your finger crooked, you're holding the note up, and you can then move towards the volume sensor to make it louder When I can forget the technical things, you can feel a much more intuitive relationship with the sounds. That's what it was all about: to articulate sounds in space in a much wider and more gestural way With this instrument, aftertouch is spread out over a distance of two metres it's much easier to make precise differentiations than it is on a keyboard"

Since 1994, when Fabeck performed with the Chromasone at one of London's notorious Disobey club nights, he has been commissioned to perform a number of live soundtracks, notably to *The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari*, where the instrument's crimson glow coupled with Fabeck's intricate hand gestures reportedly distracted many pairs of eyes from the screen For Fabeck, it's important to reinstate this physical, performative aspect within electronic music, although he's received flak for this from hardline 'acousmatic' musicians, a purist faction which eschews performance in favour of 'sound diffusion' playbacks "The idea goes back to Plato and the ancient Greek orators who used to deliver speeches from behind a sheet, so that you would only concentrate on the message, not the means," he says. "The direction I've gone in the last few years is the complete opposite of that — I'm saying there must be a perceived relation between what you see and what you hear, instead of a mystery about it."

So will the Chromasone survive, or end up as a late 20th century curio in the V&A Museum? There are no immediate plans for a commercial version, although Fabeck can envisage a smaller unit with different perspex shapes — a diamond, sphere, or a cigar shaped 'fretless' version But perhaps audiences' frustrations with Techno's self-effacing stage presence will encourage more firms to open up their R&D wallets for projects like the Chromasone After all, as Fabeck observes. "We've only just come back into a period of instrument building, after the 30s It was really the tape recorder that killed that, because of the war effort and the need to advance the tape recorder Then, of course, all the music after the war was basically tape-based — the exploration of recorded sound Now we're coming to the end of that." ☐

Walter Fabeck and the Chromasone provide soundtracks to Un Chien Andalou *and* Les Astronautes *in January 1998 at four UK venues — see next month's Soundings* or *check* The Wire *Website for details. Contact him via e-mail* walter@chrom demon co uk

PHOTO IRIS GARRELFS

on location

Going live: festivals, concerts, clubs in the flesh

Nick Cave

An Evening Of Sound And Light In Tribute To La Monte Young And Marian Zazeela

UK: London Barbican

Tribute concerts in fin de siecle Britain often take the form of mimicry — Nowaysis, The Bootleg Beatles — so it's possible that many would-be attendees at this tribute to two of the pivotal figures in the history of Minimalist music may have been chastened by the thought of *anyone* getting up to do the full Monte. You know, characters in 60s beard-drag doing Dream House sets that last several years without a break. In fact, although this particular tribute had an air of the hastily convened about it (like, just how many of the artists involved had any real links with Young's music?), it was an altogether more serious affair. Organised by Mark Webber, Pulp's guitarist and long term Young freak, and promoter Alex Poots, the evening was designed to raise funds to help Young, whose mostly unreleased music generates very little income, and his partner Marian Zazeela pay their hospital bills. The programme made a fleeting, mercifully unobtrusive mention of Zazeela's illness. It also discreetly revealed some major facts about the couple's relationship: the duo have never spent a night apart since 22 June 1962. Zazeela, a fine artist whose contribution to the Dream House was its staging and light designs, willingly subsumed her world into Young's.

The featured artists included Nick Cave with Dirty Three/Bad Seeds violinist Warren Ellis, The Gavin Bryars Ensemble, The London Chamber Orchestra playing a fierce rendition of Steve Martland's *Crossing The Border*, Pulp and Spiritualized, plus compere Anthony H Wilson, and film, video or audio contributions from Terry Riley, Yoko Ono, Spring Heel Jack

Pulp

PHOTOS: JOHN CHEVES

with Paul Catling, and a quick video 'hello' from the evening's beneficiaries Young's original 60s collaborators Tony Conrad and John Cale were notably absent. It would be interesting to hear their views about the night's fundraiser, given Young's rather uncharitable denial of others' access to the tapes (and consequently the myths) they helped construct over three decades ago

The participants might have been in no doubt as to Young's immense significance to minimal music and its aftermath, but one wonders how aware some sections of the audience were of his work. The sections that were closest to the spirit of Young's music were received by either polite applause (Terry Riley, Young's *Well Tuned Piano* excerpt), or baffled laughter (a sadly predictable response to Yoko) Kraftwerk, rumoured to be present in corporeal or cyborg form, in the end limited their participation to donating a handful of leftover T-shirts from their Luton Hoo gig earlier this year, which were duly auctioned by an embarrassed looking Wilson Webber had stressed that this was not an official Pulp gig, but given the expectation that the group's 1995 album *Different Class* had generated, many people sat through the proceedings just to be rewarded with three songs from Jarvis Cocker and company at the end These were, incidentally, well worth waiting for, especially "This Is Hardcore", in which the singer, aided by the solid strings of The London Chamber Orchestra, finally reached his apotheosis, a mindmelt with Serge Gainsbourg

Pulp aside, the overriding curiosity of the concert was the amount of participants upon whom Young's music was, at best, indirectly influential Riley (who appeared in a video excerpt from "Eastern Man") and Ono (whose DAT-delivered poems were the emoodiment of a Fluxus type of brevity) were obvious candidates, as too, at a push, were Spiritualized and Spring Heel Jack. Likewise Bryars, whose *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* was rendered in all its infinite and Norman Wisdom-like glory Nick Cave's debt to New York Minimalism is less apparent, but nonetheless, playing piano and accompanied half the time by Ellis, he delivered the concert's superlative moments a bravura version of "The Mercy Seat", selections from *The Boatman's Call*, and an acoustic version of The Birthday Party's "Dead Joe" Cave presently concentrates all his old, restless energy into a controlled intensity that delivers his work like a bolt between the eyes Ellis, too, is an important figure in this transition, his long, liquid lines giving expression to his own deeply rooted tunes

Cave's set finished with a reading of *Time Lesum Transeuntum*, a chilling set piece that should not be hidden away (as it presently is) on a tacky *X-Files* inspired album Wilson then whisked a video of Young and The Forever Blues Band, recorded at New York's Knitting Factory, onto the screen An abrupt change of pace, but as with Riley's piece, its essentially improvised nature provided a focus for Spiritualized's short, dissatisfying set. Selections from *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* began with rhythm shifts reminiscent of Steve Reich, until the realisation struck that this was just a happy accident. To give Jason Pierce his due, this perhaps didn't matter so much videos of Young's jam sessions were evidence that Minimalism had room for wit and spontaneity, too

LOUISE GRAY

A non-profit arts organisation, The MELA Foundation, has been set up by Young and Zazeela It accepts donations to enable them to continue their work. Fax 001 212 226 7802

Adventures In Modern Music

UK Nottingham Essance

In the shadow of Nottingham Castle are carved scenes from the charitable career of one Robin Hood At the hub of the city's commercial zone you can buy into The Robin Hood Experience On this particular October night, outlaw culture of a different kind is being feted by state intervention and private enterprise alike, as the notoriously reclusive sound sculptors :zoviet*france have been teased out of their Newcastle foxhole along with Autechre, Neotropic and DJs 4 Hero, to take part in this City Council-funded, *Wire*-sponsored alt.club event —part of the month-long Now Ninety7 multi-arts festival

Watching Riz Maslen, aka Neotropic, at work, the discussions in *The Wire* recently about women in music cease to make sense Her presence here and now, concentratedly cueing up records, dropping in bursts of spoken word exotica, loading samples and shuffling DATs, is almost certainly a reflection of the infinitely wider sexual demographic shift delineated in Sadie Plant's recent study of women in technology, *Zeros + Ones*, but there's nothing remotely gendered about the music she makes Women, they say, respond to bass, but precious few actually create it. Maslen's low-end excavations — warm, recombinant electric funk sandblasted with squealing noise-bombs — aspire to more than simple melodious thunk.

Fading in with a drone that seems to last a quarter of an hour, the eagerly anticipated Autechre/:zoviet*france soundclash is *big* They probably won't thank me for saying this, but the space they open up during this non-stop hour and a half improvisation is one of the closest we've come to producing a British kosmische music. Sean Booth spends the entire duration on his knees, transfixed by some small FX processor, thumbing it repeatedly like a Gameboy addict. There's barely any sign exchanged between the two camps The :z*f duo are content to sketch out the music's boundaries gigantic vaults of radio static, sheeted drone layers a sonic womb

In all this gargantuan space, the jags and dropped stitches of Autechre's music don't quite tug and tweeze perceptions open as much as usual Only halfway through do they start bleeding rhythm patterns into the mix, eccentric, unstable beat patterns with their heads and tails lopped The final 20 minutes are a slow, painfully loud retrobum home with both sides letting loose some tremendous seismic shudders of bass, making my nose-bone rattle against the skull By which time those in the audience who've stuck with it — and there are many — are flat on the floor Rhythm, it appears, isn't always a dancer

ROB YOUNG

Riz Maslen

PHOTO IRIS GARRELFS

WOMEX 97 (Worldwide Music Expo)

France Marseille Palais du Pharo

I know I am in the right hotel because the dog is wearing a nappy (for those interested in such things Pampers brand, new style, from birth to three months) Except that this dog has certainly more than three months under its collar and is, after all, a dog "Monsieur, le chien est incontinent." Ah, that explains it then

WOMEX, not to be confused with WOMAD, has been going for four years First held in Berlin, then Brussels, last year it was supposed to be in Copenhagen Amidst much angst and recriminations it was cancelled, but arose again this year in Marseille Next year it will be in Stockholm and after that a return to Berlin Essentially it's a combined trade fair and conference for anybody connected with 'World Music' Integral with this are evening showcase performances, open to the public, for groups and artists As conferences go, then, it's not expensive, and the definition of a 'professional' delegate is wide Major labels are thin on the ground, independents thick.

The showcases are held in a converted warehouse in Marseille's dockland area There are three stages and various rooms and levels that I never quite manage to navigate, plus juice bars ("for sick people", a colleague informs me) and alcohol bars, food stations and sweet counters, merchandising stalls and wide open spaces where people just hang out. Feels good to me, and I can't help feeling it is exactly what London lacks Over the next few days I randomly sample what's on offer until fatigue, boredom or inebriation get in the way Nice life for the delegates, but from the artist's point for view, a gig like WOMEX can be pretty close to hell on earth half the audience hasn't paid to get in, and the other half hasn't paid to see you

First out of the hat for me are Tarika, a hard working neo-traditional group originating from Madagascar A colleague bemoans how, over the years, the outfits of Tarika's women performers have become gradually less revealing I laugh, move on and then feel guilty I abhor music journalism that spends more time talking about the clothes — for women or for men — than the music, and though I do admire Tarika's professionalism

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and stamina, they don't inspire me tonight.

Fanfare Ciocarlia enter on another stage, and their set suggests that there is a village in North East Romania that has one wind-up gramophone player, one scratched 78 copy of "The Flight Of The Bumble Bee", and a set of instruments left there by a visiting brass band some time in the distant past. Fanfare Ciocarlia's line-up includes two clarinets, three trumpets and four variations on a tuba or euphonium, not forgetting one bass drum with one stick. "We're one of the last ensembles of our kind where we come from —and we're the fastest of them all," they announce, and ten men, aged 22 to 68, proceed to amphetamine their way through what I'm told are mixed Romanian, Turkish, Macedonian, Serbian and modern Western dances, slowing up occasionally for a melancholic dirge or two. They're actually quite magnificent, but as they leave the stage and snake into the crowd, playing all the while, I hear each part as it passes by and wonder: how do you present music from one culture into the performance situation of another?

Friday: the torrential rain has stopped and Cheb Mami, 'Le Prince Du Rai', is booked to appear. But first there's the rolling (or rumbling?) Jololi Revue to enjoy, featuring Cheikh Lo, Dimi Mint Abba and Doura Barry. Dimi Mint Abba performed without pretention and sang with a genuine passion. Cheikh Lô shadow-boxed his passion but never really landed a punch. I was told the group had lost their original percussionist and found another in Frankfurt (whether in the airport wasn't clear), but I noticed no evident fault that could be specifically attributed to that particular event.

Perhaps it's not the group's fault. Perhaps the basic function of the live programming for an event such as WOMEX is for artists to prove they have a professional discipline that will allow them to survive the rigours of touring Europe and the West. Every performance I see fulfils this condition, but inspiration seems more elusive.

This is confirmed when Cheb Mami comes on the stage. During his set, all I can think is: why continue to allow yourself to be called the 'Prince of Rai' when it only serves to remind you that Khaled, the king, is still alive? Perhaps I'm becoming too jaded, too spoilt for choice. So later I enter a cold crowd at DJ Ritu's Asian Equation live music/DJ soundclash to throw my critic's hat down, like a handbag on the floor of a Mecca Ballroom. Earlier I'd been overwhelmed by the taiko drums and dress of the Oedo Sukeroku Taiko group from Japan. Seven lithe bodies beating the hell out of large taiko drums. Music and theatre, theatre and music. If you're taking music from one culture into another, does it help to have a fine line in dress and presentation? Probably, yes. But is that the most important thing? Hopefully, no.

Saturday, the final day: Voce Di Corsica offer the unaccompanied polyphonic singing of six men with hands over their ears, centred around the quite magnificent voice of Petru Guelfucci, a beekeeper from Corsica. I love this. I want to be absorbed, to immerse myself completely in their voices. I also have a soft spot for Sally Nyolo, ex-Zap Mama member and here at short notice with her drums, bass and lead guitar group, plus two backing vocals, playing her particular brand of Cameroonian based music.

Then Emil Zrihan, a 43 year old Moroccan Jew relocated to Israel comes on stage. Small, round with a florid white cravat and a blue velvet waistcoat, Emil takes the microphone, holds it away from his mouth, picks his note and while gradually increasing the volume, pulls the mic slowly closer to finish in a glorious, melismatic flourish before embarking on another. The group (violin, oud, keyboards, bass and percussion), conventionally seated and in suits, wait their turn to comment on each vocal line before kicking in with a wedding dance groove. Emil's face turns various shades of purple and the sweat drips as the high notes come. Here, theatricality is born of music and seems immune from conscious presentation.

IAIN SCOTT

Thomas Koner

PHOTO: EDIE VEE

Jürgen Reble & Thomas Köner: *Tabula Smaragdina*

France, Paris Louvre Auditorium

Thomas Koner's name is generally associated with the meditative drift of albums such as *Permafrost*, *Aubrite* or his contribution to the recent *Driftworks* box set. His substantial body of recorded work has tended to overshadow his parallel involvement in film-based projects. Koner has provided the musical accompaniment for silent films on several occasions and regularly takes part in ground-breaking live shows in collaboration with German experimental film maker Jürgen Reble. An opportunity to verify the current state of play of the Koner-Reble partnership was provided by the recent 3D film season organised by the Museum of the Louvre in Paris. Thanks to the imaginative, open-ended approach of its curator, the spacious, modern expanses of the Louvre Auditorium have become one of the breeding grounds for the small but hardy experimental film scene currently blossoming in France.

Like previous film seasons at the Louvre, this 3D festival was conceived as a response to art historical preoccupations. Three-dimensional imagery represents a departure from the aesthetics of painting, which dominate the history of cinema: these techniques break up the flat surface of the cinema screen, producing an illusion of depth. The films on show ranged from 50s and 60s sci-fi and horror movies, to the recent cathartic experiments of American film maker Ken Jacobs, who creates a three-dimensional effect through the use of alternating images. Jacobs put his eager audience of film buffs through a gruelling yet strangely uplifting test. Using a shutter and two projectors that advanced frame by frame, he produced flickering images of waves that moved slowly but relentlessly forward in almost total silence for its 107 minute duration.

Jacobs's film proved a challenging experience, and Koner and Reble's show the following night was informed, as always, by a similarly uncompromising, hardbitten attitude. Their previous collaboration, *Alchemie*, which was presented at the Louvre in 1995, featured a ten metre film loop subjected to chemical treament and destroyed at the end of the performance. Projector noises and the hiss of the chemicals as they corroded the film provided the sound sources for Köner's musical accompaniment. It was an intense, holistic experience that married the complex, rich timbres of the music with the fizzing energy of the film treatments. This time round, the duo presented *Tabula Smaragdina*, a live, as always unrehearsed performance. Reble projected a print of a film to which he had applied layers of chemical substances. His customised projectors spewed out superimposed images that modulated into kaleidoscopic mosaics, grid-like patterns and strange mythological creatures before disintegrating and reforming anew. Dressed in a white outfit and black cap, Köner cut a striking figure in the half-light, as he selected tracks from a reservoir of treated, pitched and harmonised sounds stored on CDs. Gong samples merged with noises sourced from a projector, providing the soundtrack to a shadowy, dream-like half-world awash with low frequencies and decaying timbres. Eschewing traditional notions of rhythm and melody, the soundtrack underscored the tensions in the pulsating colours and shapes. Likewise, the images were bereft of structure and narrative. More than just a film, *Tabula Smaragdina* is a visual and auditory experience in equal measure, that seals new and exciting connections between sound and images.

RAHIMA KHAZAM

print run

New music books: read, raved about, roughed up

Bernard Herrmann

PHOTO: BFI STILLS LIBRARY

Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History Of Film Music

By Russell Lack

QUARTET (PBK £15)

In the 1940s Charlie Chaplin wrote a score for his 1923 silent movie *A Woman Of Paris*. In the 70s he reissued the movie complete with score: this was how the great comic auteur wanted it heard. But to modern ears his music played havoc with his own film's subtleties, generally sentimentalising one of the best works of its era. So much, you might say, for Chaplin's skills as a composer, and besides, as the years passed, everyone knows that his skills as a film maker got very soggy indeed.

But to read Russell Lack's history of sound in film, which also attempts something of a psychosociology of the *effects* of sound on filmgoers, is to understand two things, one with much force and excitement, the other rather more murkily. First, as MGM's legendary 20s whizzkid producer Irving Thalberg is quoted as saying, "There never was a silent film", that the success of cinema in the 'pre-sound' days before *The Jazz Singer* was almost invariably linked to live music accompaniment — pianists, organists, ensembles of lesser or greater size — hired by the cinemas. While such pioneering directors as DW Griffith took pains to provide appropriate sheet music specially written (or else borrowed, from classics or pop), any competent accompanist soon amassed a repertoire of stock devices — love music, sad music, chase music — with which they could improvise at a moment's notice, sight unseen. This well-researched insight is the backbone of the first part of the book, "The Silent Era".

The second, longer part, "The Sound Era", is as rich in fascinating anecdotes, and provides the evidence for the second major fact — but negatively, and with a sense of buried frustration on the writer's part. It's this music may be essential to the enjoyment of film, but its 'meaning', its functional effect, seems more mutable than universal, and this mutability seems to sabotage all attempts to explain or to codify such meanings (Lack makes and abandons several). Not only will people of different ages and backgrounds respond to different styles or orchestrations or melodies differently, but the same person at different times can be swept up in or else repelled by the same device.

The 'sound era' began in the late 20s, when microphones and synchronised sound technology, much cheaper than live musicians, also brought dialogue and sound effects into play. Today, synthesizers and digital information systems allow for vast precision in sound capture, sound construction, montage, layering and positioning within the soundfield. Now, traditional dots-on-lines writing and emoting skills have to be subsumed in a far wider technicity of *concrète* potential and SFX convention. Lack faces a fairly nightmarish problem of organising the vast mass of information (historical and biographical), definition (aesthetic and psychological) and explanation interspersed with speculation. His solution is in effect a series of essays, on technology, copyright, genre, theory, the use of pop, electronic or classical music, experimental film, and so on. A great deal of territory is extremely swiftly covered, resisting easy summary; the section also darts forwards and backwards a lot, making the history a little hard to follow at times.

Lack's organisational approach may also have made it harder for him to confront something the greatest film makers have known in their bones: our apparent double-consciousness towards film and film music, our simultaneous will to be seduced and will to resist, to be entranced and to be alienated. In a section on Bernard Herrmann, between discussions of *Citizen Kane* and *Psycho*, is briefly discussed a lesser known 1944 thriller, *Hangover Square*, in which Herrmann appears to have debuted a remarkable trick that of (as French critic Michel Chion describes it) 'anempathetic' music, a soundtrack that 'doesn't care'. Here and later, in Hitchcock's *Strangers On A Train*, Herrmann uses hurdy-gurdy or fairground music to soundtrack a murder. Though it has sanction in the fairground setting in the latter, and perhaps as a glimpse into a deranged psyche in the former, the overt emotional content of this scoring is absolutely and deliberately at odds with the action — and far more effectively chilling as a result. Analogues of this device today pervade every kind of cinema, low, high, light and dark.

Sometimes film music can provide less an amplification of appropriate mood than an off-screen dimension of awareness of alternative or 'inappropriate' moods. It offers perhaps not a route to objectivity, but at the very least a dialectical counterpoint to the various subjectivities within the drama, a way to retain distance even as one identifies with this or that character or situation. One clear instance is a development Lack himself seems a little schizophrenic about: the use in the soundtrack of the chart pop song. On one hand, he discusses the distorting role of commodification and the entertainment-industry tie-in; on the other, he analyses in loving detail the layered functioning of the pop classics in *The Big Chill*. Certainly he accords a variety of experimental and arthouse films more apparent respect for their innovations, but this is a film he actually spent time analysing. If a film builds its own little universe, the pop song provides instant access to the wider world, whether it's the titanic thump of The Ronettes' "Be My Baby" opening *Mean Streets* or the spooky passion of Roy Orbison's "In Dreams" in *Blue Velvet*. But this 'wider world' perspective works quite differently in different contexts. It can underscore nostalgia or confusion, irony or cynicism, utopianism or loss, it can contrast the real with the unreal, the social with the individual, the rational with the emotional. What's more, the potency of the music in effecting this is in inverse proportion to its autonomy, its capacity to be self-contained as an artwork. The more social background it requires (or allows) to bleed in with it, the more dynamic the extra-dimensionality it can induce (this is why composed Minimalism has so much more soundtrack potential than high modernism).

The book ends with a plea that the understanding of music might come to include all the cultural, historical and sociological meanings assigned to it. But Lack has just spent almost 350 pages making this job harder, by setting out how much cinema — over some nine decades — has contributed to these assignings, and reassignings. 70s audiences heard Chaplin's music in a way he didn't, because they'd all seen and heard so many films he hadn't.

MARK SINKER

Nick Drake: The Biography

By Patrick Humphries

BLOOMSBURY (HBK £16.99)

When Nick Drake appeared on the cover of *Mojo* earlier this year, wrapped in a blanket with an anxious pout on his lips, it seemed that the perennially 'lost' singer/songwriter had finally found his way into rock daylight, 25 years after the release of his last album, the crepuscular *Pink Moon*

The cover came courtesy of a preview of Patrick Humphries's biography which sets out to redress the cult of tragic youth that has slowly grown up around Drake after he overdosed on drugs prescribed for depression in November 1974 Humphries aims to find the living Drake — not wanting him to die a "second time" through some morbid romancing of his death Not an easy task given that this was a man whose shyness left Island's press officer floundering for words beyond "Nick Drake is tall and lean", and who gradually drifted towards pathological incommunicability Given also that Humphries lost the cooperation of producer Joe Boyd, and Drake's sister, the book is inevitably left culling much of the evidence from existing interviews Humphries's own speculations tend towards the garish — Drake compared with Robert Johnson, or Siegfried Sassoon, and an awful link to the sinking of the Titanic that opens the book.

Leaving Marlborough school in 1966, Drake was tall, handsome and shy and starting to evolve a singular and hypnotic guitar style By the time he dropped out of Cambridge University in 1969, he had a contract with Joe Boyd's newly formed label, Witchseason (later sold to Island), along with John Martyn and Richard Thompson With a subdued, sensitive voice and wan symbolist lyrics, Drake's songs are reminiscent of Martyn and Joni Mitchell at their most mellow — even a touch of Stan Getz's "Desafinado" (a favourite from school, when Drake played sax) But the rippling patterns of his guitar playing are deceptively complex and harmonically unusual — something that has perhaps preserved his originality over the decades A friend from 1967 remembers him sitting on a bed and loosening the guitar strings completely before gradually tightening them, exploring the new melodic possibilities

Françoise Hardy described Drake as "an explosive mixture of purity, innocence, beauty", and found his music even more irresistible But there was a gap between his charismatic image and haunting musical style, and the distance required for him to travel to be 'Nick Drake' in a more public, performative way, which crippled his own self-confidence and eventually his career With no singles and few gigs there were barely any reviews (most of those that did get written are reprinted here) and low record sales Feeling broke and unrecognised, one of his last recorded tracks challenges *"Why leave me hanging on a star/when you deem me so high?"*

While Cat Stevens was racking up 145,000 tour miles in one year, Drake was declining appearances, walking out of the studio There was only one interview in his lifetime, for *Sounds*, and the interviewer remembers, "I don't think he once looked me in the eye" The track record for the gigs is even worse "It was embarrassing to go and see him," recalls John Martyn, "because he was obviously in such utter discomfort."

The favourite reasons for Drake's withdrawal from human intercourse include his disappointment with low record sales, experiments with drugs (there's little evidence here of anything mind-blowing), a cultivated existential coolness (Camus's *The Myth Of Sisyphus* lay by his bed the night he died), the effect of anti-depressants, or repressed homosexuality

All or none of these could have provided the conditions for his exit. Whichever, he gradually descended into what Linda Thompson describes as a kind of autism Inexorably the narrative becomes one of Drake's absence marooned for hours at a zebra crossing, discovered in a foetal crouch outside John Martyn's living room door It's not romantic, more excruciating and bleak.

Someone who saw him three days before he died recalls him crying "You remember me how I was Tell me how I was I used to be somebody" Humphries takes great efforts to find a point when 'he was', spending a lot of time on Marlborough and quotes from housemasters about happiness and healthiness But then you can only get so far with memories about Drake's rugger stride

Ironically, the alternative story, the one that led to growing appreciation from people as far apart as Tom Verlaine, Robert Smith and Everything But The Girl, takes place in a separate 'after' section Humphries assigns the beginning of the Drake cult to 1979, and the release of Island's *Fruit Tree* box set of the three albums plus four final unreleased tracks In 1986 Joe Boyd got permission to re-release this with more out-takes, making a full four albums. Suddenly you either had nothing by Nick Drake or you had everything.

There's another story here, about the shift from the toughness and urbanity needed to set up a solo act at the turn of the 70s Van Morrison and Randy Newman influenced the way Drake's potential was perceived in the industry, and in 1970 Boyd was trying out the possibility of Elton John singing Drake covers By the mid-80s, moody videos could more easily accommodate refined dreamy sensibilities, such as Ben Watt of Everything But The Girl, who admired Drake's "art of understatement"

There's a lot more we could be told about Drake's life, but the story is best left here — it merely raises the same old ghosts of pity, guilt and frustration Fans will show more interest in figuring out the baffling secrets of exactly how he got that sound

MATT FFYTCHE

Nick Drake

Shaman, Jhankri & Néle: Music Healers Of Indigenous Cultures

By Pat Moffitt Cook

ELLIPSIS ARTS (PBK/CD £19.45)

There's a strong interest these days in the healing properties of music My local New Age emporium offers a recording of an 'English Country Dawn' alongside the 'Kabbalistic Bath Soap', and various relaxation tapes "to untangle your stresses" Recorded music may get you so far, but wouldn't it be better to visit a musician's house and have them work live on your ailment? Just pick your artiste carefully Pat Moffitt Cook, an American teacher and musician, has compiled a book and CD documenting examples of healers who employ music as one element in their practice

Here is Koshalya, sitting among a group of women outside her hut in North India To tackle female reproductive problems, she sings and calls on the goddess Sitla to enter her Here is a faith healer in rural Nepal, where there are virtually no doctors, visiting a dying mother He bangs furiously on a stainless steel pie tin until he enters a trance and instructs the family how to look after the old woman Afterwards the healer can remember nothing In the Amazon jungle of Peru, a shaman performs non-invasive 'surgical operations' with rattles and ceremonial rods, even removing brain tumours The tumbling precious metals inside the rattles are thought to draw the sickness out of the patient.

Moffitt Cook has collected 18 such practitioners in this fairly brief book, from Korea and Tuva in Asia, to Haiti and St Vincent in the Caribbean, visiting, interviewing and recording most of the healers herself She stresses their generosity in sharing their knowledge with outsiders Each is described in a few pages illustrated with colour photos, and has a corresponding track on the CD The healers are largely allowed to speak for themselves, though unsurprisingly some find it difficult to put into words such a complex ritual activity which is completely interwoven with the fabric of their community "You put somebody back the way they were, and then you send them home," says Micheline Forestal of her intricate Haitian Voodoo ceremonies. In the photo Forestal is squatting fully dressed in a bath, drenched in some herbal soup and apparently arm wrestling another woman

Some healers try to explain the role of music in what they do Simon Eliet in Panama, who graduated as a clinical technician on a US Air Force base before becoming a healer, sings over plants to activate their medicinal properties. "God created the plants and told them 'you're going to cure people' When the *plantas medecinas* hear the song, then they remember the job that God gave them in the beginning."

The book has a good scratch at the surface of its subject — Moffitt Cook presents individual healers with strong personalities, though there's sometimes an irritating New Age quality of wholesome vagueness about her writing. Her respect for her interviewees is not in doubt, but less bland deference and more concrete details would make the book more vivid And a picture caption like, "Tupile's youth enjoy an afternoon of traditional dance and music making", tells us precisely nothing.

The CD has the problem of briefly documenting events not primarily intended as musical performances When you strip away everything but the sound of a ritual, how much is left? Some of the tracks are unremarkable from a musical point of view, simply demonstrating how little we understand of what these people are doing Exceptions include the amazing racket made by Tibetan Phawo Nyidhon, exploring the sheer power of noise Alexander Tavakay from Tuva beats a drum and imitates birds, and clearly this kind of ritual has influenced musicians like drummer Milton Graves and Keiji Haino, with his leaping-in-the-dark percussion mysteries. Also very fine is the full-blooded voice of Native American Kanucas Littlefish, who tells how his singing cured a man's broken leg.

CLIVE BELL

PHOTO BOB CRAWFORD

Conversation With The Blues

By Paul Oliver

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS (HBK/CD £35)

"A Quarter In A Tin Cup" is the caption for the cover photograph on *Conversation With The Blues*. Blind Arvella Gray, blues guitarist, plays and sings for quarters on the corner of Halsted and Maxwell, Chicago, a tiny tin cup pinned to his lapel, white stick balanced on his arm. It's one of many stark, moving images — visual, musical, spoken — from an indispensable document in blues history.

British blues historian Paul Oliver travelled through the South in 1960, as segregation was collapsing in the face of civil resistance by the black population. This was his first field trip, following only a handful of pioneers after Alan Lomax in the 30s. It was the end of a musical era. Oliver interviewed and recorded blues musicians, famous and unknown, and photographed them at home and work. The result is a book unique, not only in his output, but also for its immediacy, passion and subdued anger. *Conversation* was first published by Cassell in 1965, and has long been out of print. This lavishly produced reissue has a CD and a new introduction.

Blind Arvella Gray was one of the unknowns. He tells the story of his blindness and his struggle to master blues guitar. His fierce, driving version of "John Henry" is on the CD, which features some unknown but powerful singers and not a few spavined old pianos, as well as spoken contributions. Highlights include two stately piano blues, Little Brother Montgomery's "Vicksburg Blues" and "Colorado Springs Blues" by Edwin Pickens — "the last of the barrelhouse and saw-mill pianists". Pianist Henry Brown plays his sturdy classic "Henry Brown Blues". Otis Spann, John Lee Hooker and Roosevelt Sykes are some of the better-known blues players who tell their story.

Oliver's desire to disengage the blues from jazz wasn't always recognised, and among original reviews quoted on the jacket, his book is praised as "one of the finest ever produced on a jazz subject". He interviewed singers of all generations, with a minimum of intervention, aiming to subvert simplistic distinctions such as rural versus urban blues, to discover the social context of the music, its relation to slavery, to religion and to jazz. The musicians' plain words make the oppressed conditions of their lives very clear. "It continually amazed me," he writes, "in view of the bitterness of discrimination, that we were treated so generously by the blues singers and their families and that the interviewees were so frank in their narratives."

For Oliver, "the story of the blues is a story of minor singers rather than major ones, of men with small circles of acquaintance, limited aspirations and humble talents." And they are mostly men here, since women were more attracted to gospel, Oliver argues. Guitarist Jewel Long from Sealy, Texas, had never been far from Austin County, and had never heard of England — "What kind of language do they speak in your country? How d'ya learn to speak our language so good?" he asks. Sealy was an "inhospitable township", and when Oliver joined the guitarist in a cafe the white proprietor threatened to call the police.

But dotted through spare narratives of the share-croppers' and other humble lives are memories of blues legends such as Robert Johnson and Son House. The result is a wonderful marriage of text, pictures and music. Oliver selects and composes many powerful and evocative pictures, treated here in duotone for extra depth. They show dilapidated joints in Chicago where Muddy Waters and Otis Spann earned a living, segregated cafes in Rome, Mississippi, the tar-papered shacks of Yazoo City.

Many Civil Rights campaigners objected to the "stereotyping" of African-Americans as blues lovers. NAACP campaigner Marion Oldham told Oliver "this is a move back, among my friends I don't think I know of anyone who is a fan of spirituals or blues." As Oliver writes, the blues is the music of manual labourers, but "for good or ill it is the aesthetic expression" of the society that produced it. *Conversation* preserves a blues history that would otherwise have disappeared.

ANDY HAMILTON

Unfiled: Music Under New Technology

Edited by Chris Cutler

ReR/RECOMMENDED SOURCEBOOK 0402 (PBK/CD £11)

Capitalism collapses everything into competing claims on our attention, making 'resistant' and 'marginal' outposts hard to maintain. An admirable stand was taken by Henry Cow in 1968. They asked why Marxist politics and uncompromisingly avant garde music should not go together. However, having swallowed the Euro-Communist travesty of Gramsci — the project of cultural hegemony to be achieved by alliance with vaguely defined 'progressive forces' — the Cow posse couldn't relate to the prole nihilism of punk (you needed dialectics and its sense of the oppositions of identity for that, or maybe simply a sense of humour). Over the 80s, Henry Cow dissolved themselves into various genres that promised righteous cultural resistance, using the Recommended record shop and the intermittent *ReR Quarterly* as theoretical journal and co-ordinator.

Ideology is a hard taskmaster. The need for *Unfiled*'s contributors to play the 'oppositional card leads to some painful distortions. Jon Rose interviews Harry Lookofsky, a name that has long intrigued those who scan the small print on records with New York string sections. Lookofsky worked with Elvin Jones and loved Clifford Brown, yet everything he's done is twisted round to trash the so-called 'authenticity' of jazz. Did Rose fail his NYJO audition many years ago, perhaps, and is still smarting?

Chris Cutler interviews Tod Dockstader, apparently an ahead-of-his-time *musique concrète* genius. However, in the absence of any aesthetic save that of exclusion and marginality, you feel it is Dockstader's 'undiscovered' status that really impresses Cutler. Every time Pierre Boulez is mentioned he is roundly abused, though going on the musical evidence, ReR has yet to release anything to equal a single one of his piano sonatas. In other words, music is not really the issue here, but adherence to some ideology of 'avant garde transgression' and/or failure.

The sense of vacuous formalism is compounded by Ron Rice's "A Brief History Of Anti-Records And Conceptual Records", which attempts to connect Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's brilliant critique of the gramophone in 1923 to ludic art stunts like "1987. Peter Lardong creates little chocolate records, playable by eating them". Whenever you hear the word 'create', reach for your Sex Pistol!

Michael Gerzon re-interprets Beethoven from the perspective of Free Improvisation. He shows how slow and contingent was the recognition of Beethoven's late work as great. The role of black America in preserving improvisation is diminished, and improvisation becomes the True Classical Music the middle classes are guilty of rejecting. Though tainted by idealist notions of the music the bourgeoisie ought to like, this is an original and carefully argued essay.

Artist Qubais Ghazala explains how to convert discarded electrical items into generators of strange sounds. Once the circuit-bends have been soldered in with switches, your broken appliances become musical instruments, sprayed in metallic finishes and photographed in colour against satin, they look good too. Tom Waits bought one (this DIY advice is somewhat tarnished by Ghazala's execrable "someone fiddling about on his music centre" piece on the accompanying CD). Kersten Glandien takes Andrew Jones's book of interviews with Musique Actuelle performers to task for concentrating on stars, and not tracing this "globally scattered music scene" in all its complexity — in other words, he doesn't accept ReR's alternative ethos.

Philip Tagg writes of the raves his daughter attends. Despite a brave attempt to resist fashionable theory, he succumbs to postmodernism's penchant for ersatz apocalypse, and decides that raves are the "end of music" as Western civilisation has known it (or at least as this Frith-generation rocker has known it). Maybe if Tagg actually went along to a rave, he'd grasp that the "lack of focus" he finds so epochal is about as revolutionary as Ye Olde Disco. Tagg's musical analysis — bpm, time-signatures and breaks — is refreshingly unideological, so it's sad to see him succumbing to cyberdrivel.

Chris Cutler describes how recording breaks with natural scale and invokes a virtual space. He makes some telling points. If you're listening to a record while reading, it'll make you reflect on your reception of the sound. However, Cutler's "natural to virtual" quickly becomes another epochal watershed, another postmodern apocalypse. The paradoxes of mimesis have occupied philosophy for centuries, but somehow this time the discovery is earth-shattering. Breathless anticipations of the new have been the bread-and-butter of avant movements ever since the Futurists pasticked the *Communist Manifesto*, but here — because it parrots theories already holding sway in academy and media — the rhetoric is tired.

The CD is a collection of scraps with no discernable musical aesthetic: a 'deconstruction' (what else?) of a Congolese tune, harpsichord music from a staging of *Othello*, Brian Woodbury's Variety Orchestra in a school orchestra style setting of a folk song (presumably here because there's a Marty Cutler on banjo!) and a cringeworthy 'event' involving Cutler, Shelley Hirsch and Jon Rose live on Ljubljana radio (infantile egomaniacs "amaze the natives" — *idiot avant*, perhaps?). Richard Barrett supplies classy electronic abstractions, the straight careerism of his composer's CV jarring with the lite-anarcho/networking tone of the other contributions. Tom Dimuzio's environmental collage and Keith Rowe and Alain de Filips's lo-fi industrial soundscape sound good, but gain nothing in this company.

By a perverse yet dogmatic inversion, if any music has been rendered socially marginal, *Unfiled* automatically considers it avant garde. However, given the inflation of audio-material available today, *contexts* and *declaratory social judgment* are crucial for any genuine resistance. More "freedom from institutions of power" is just more *stuff*, another plea for attention. By presenting any and every example of asocial sound production as musical truth — curating a motley of rejectamenta — *Unfiled* obscures the issues for anyone trying to make sense of what capitalism does to art. Yes, I want opposition, Mr Cutler, but must it all sound so wretched?

BEN WATSON

new notes at a glance
information from SPNM

december

2 YCAT: Warburton & Currie, percussion
Alvarez, Smadbeck, Hasenpflug*, Mikl*
WH

2 The London Chamber Group
Taylor*** Burnell*** Turner*, Moss*** Steer*, Inigo**, Livingstone*** Hoban*** Gittins*** Davey*** P Walton*** Malvin
BMIC

2 London Sinfonietta 30th Birthday Commissions
Vivier**, Xenakis***
QEH

3 University of Durham – Musicon
Abe, Alvarez, Henze, Cutler, Smadbeck, Hasenpflug, Xenakis
Elvet Methodist Church, Durham DH1 0191 374 3210

3 City Chamber Choir
Britten, Blake, Weir, Dove, Leighton, Walton, RR Bennett
St Mary Woolnoth, Lombard St, London EC3 0171 249 7368

3 Paul Patterson 50th birthday
Patterson
St Paul's Church, Hammersmith, London W6 0181 231 2734

4 Orphy Robinson 'Africen Miles'
Miles Davis
Bonington Theatre Arnold Leisure Centre, High St, Nottingham 0115 967 0114

4 Hallé Orchestra
Hadyn, Caskan, Schubert
Bridgewater Hall, Lower Moseley Street, Manchester M2 0161 907 9000

4 Philharmonia Orchestra
Reise*** Blake, Tchaikovsky
RFH

4 City University Symphony Orchestra
Lutoslawski, Shostakovich, Dvorak
GC

5 York University New Music Group
Turnage, Finnissy, Bryars, Dillon, Weir
Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, University of York, York YO1 01904 432439

6 Brunei Ensemble
RR Bennett, Copland, Warren*** Prokofiev
St George's Brandon Hill, Bristol BS2 0117 923 0359

9 Perspectives Ensemble
Marco, Gaos, Garcia-Abril, Lara, Garhard
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 0171 354 3281

9 Safri Duo
Reich, Mendelssohn, ter Valdhuis, Pape, Siegal, Ravel, Fuzzy
WH

9 Great Performers – Evelyn Glennie
de Latour*** Tanaka, Psathas, Masson, Zivkovic, Heath***
BH

9 John McCabe, piano
Pitfield, Beardsley*** Rawsthorne, Forshaw*** Ellis, John R Williamson*** McCabe, Golightly***
BMIC

11 Northern Sinfonia
Ravel, Burrell*, Schumann
BH

11 John McCabe, piano
Pitfield, Beardsley*** Rawsthorne, Forshaw*** Ellis, John R Williamson*** McCabe, Golightly***
Sema Group Concert Hall, RNCM, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 0161 907 5278

12 Orchestra of St John's Christmas concert
Handel, Montague***
JS Bach, Vivaldi
JSS

12 Schubert – A Contemporary Celebration
Reimannt**, Rota, Schubert
BH

13 London Sinfonietta 30th Birthday Commissions
Schönberg, Goehr*** Wolpe**, Stravinsky
QEH

15 London Saxophonic
Nyman
PR

17 Vainglory: Futurists
Antell, Ives, Lourie, Mossolov, Nancarrow, Powell, Roslavets
Burgh House, New End Square, Hampstead, London NW3 0181 944 7141

17 London Concord Singers
Ball, Poulenc, Stanford
St Cyprian's Church, Glentworth Street, London NW1 0171 354 3195

18 University of Huddersfield Symphony Orchestra
Mahler, Webern, Shostakovich
Town Hall, Ramsden Street, Huddersfield HD1 01484 472003

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* London Première

BH: *Barbican Hall, Silk Street, London EC2 0171 638 8891*
BMIC: *British Music Information Centre, Stratford Place, London W1 0171 499 8567*
GC: *St Giles' Cripplegate, Barbican, London EC2 0171 638 8891*
JSS: *St John's, Smith Square, London SW1 0171 222 1061*
RFH, QEH, PR: *South Bank Centre, London SE1 0171 960 4242*
WH: *Wigmore Hall, 36 Wigmore Street, London W1 0171 935 2141*

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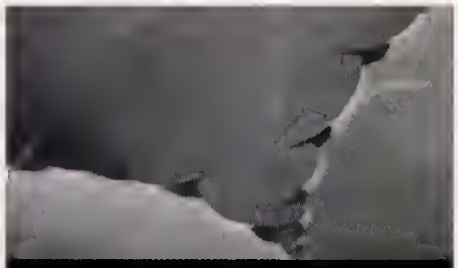

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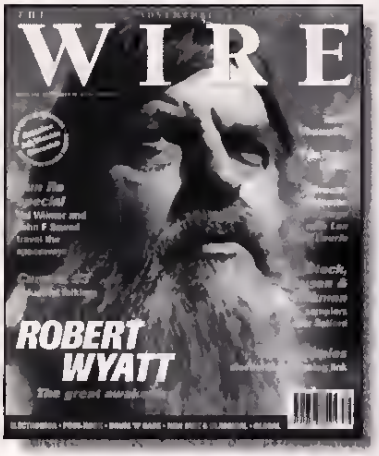

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reaches the end of the road

Developing slowly over months, if not years, the creepy inexorability of having nothing whatsoever to say in a regular column is a particularly miserable feeling I often begin columns by admitting I have nothing to say, then discover that there are, after all, thoughts to unburden But when there's nothing, really nothing, and only the symbolic shadow of a Bernardian Coach and Horses offering scant refuge for the literally thoughtless or periodically unwell, then the trick of computer desktop graphics becomes excessively poignant The crafty illusion of Microsoft's blank page blots content from the empty mind even less efficiently than a white sheet of 100 gramme paper floating under a poised pen At least a pen may drip

To be honest, it's a sour time of year for those of us who have developed an indifference to contemporary music. For starters, there are the end-of-year lists to negotiate How do I admit to magazines either ruthlessly fashionable or culturally conscientious that my film awareness of the past ten months has been handicapped by a fiasco of didn't-quite-make-it expeditions to films finally watched on hired video in disrupted stages over a period of two or three days, the actual incidence of cinema visits to adult films (and when I say 'adult' I mean *Lost Highway* as opposed to *The Railway Children*) being overwhelmed by obligatory viewing of child- (if not moron-) oriented stuff such as *Bean*? I'm not complaining, or not too much, you understand, it's just that magazines, not to mention you, the reader, don't wish to know

When it comes to choosing the best albums of 1997, music being the supposed case in point on this progressively less blank page, I've listened to virtually nothing this month, other than the Toru Takemitsu film soundtrack album released by Nonesuch It's not new material The composer is dead I already own half the tracks on other CDs It's already been reviewed, admirably and positively, in this magazine As for the films represented on this compilation, the first one I saw, probably *Woman In The Dunes*, was in some exploitation cinema that has almost certainly been replaced by a branch of Body Shop, even the last one I saw, the intoxicating *Rikyu*, was broadcast on television in a year that seems like a faint memory from another lifetime, since so much has happened in the intervening period So it's not exactly cutting edge then, is it?

The problem is, it is

I guess there were years of column writing during the 80s that felt as utterly thrill-free as this one I can't remember There always seemed to be HipHop or House or Acid to enliven an otherwise grotesque vista Retrospectively, even a group like A Flock Of Seagulls had a purpose in the creator's master plan, if only to serve as a funny line in a Tarantino film

In a similar way, the deadly experience of writing from absolute zero delivers revelations of its own For

instance, I just realised that the painful swollen digit on my right hand is a consequence of writing one third of a new book with said digit cramped in a talon formation, possibly from reading too much Edgar Allan Poe A week of swimming in the Aegean Sea last week and the thing began to be almost useable Now I'm back to writing, head full of sawdust, and I notice the repetitive strain injury position of my fingers

So writing is bad for your health, everybody knows that But to come back to my theme, which seems to be a letter of public resignation, mixed in with one of those epistles of despair provoked by calendar years in which music is a purgatorial zone of worthless concerts, horrible CDs and shoddy journalism to come back to that theme, or attempt a return, I guess the best you can say is that your awareness of fine qualities in music becomes acute

Anybody who has drowned their readers in Electronica/Prog drum 'n' bass hyperbole during the past year should listen to Takemitsu's *Rikyu*, or *Woman In The Dunes*, simply in order to acquire a benchmark of what's possible in the world Similarly, The Stanley Brothers' recordings reissued on John Fahey's Revenant label are a smack in the mouth for anybody who thinks Weller rock is more than a bunch of self-conscious gestures

I'm not a big fan of bluegrass, but these early tracks by The Stanley Brothers, made in the late 1940s/early 1950s, are the devil's work, crazy with energy and weird for the evocative bluntness of their doomed narratives *"As I walked in the wayside tavern, the smell of drink was in the air"* is the opening line of "The Girl Behind The Bar" Nothing special about those words on the page, yet sung in The Stanley Brothers' high harmonies, they create an extraordinary sense of high expectation flooded with dread They are songs about living and dying, as brutal as that.

Of course, this is dangerous territory Music can answer those needs without seeming to do so There is excessive use of the rear view mirror as it is, without some bleeding heart columnist like me inflating their temporary angst into a puff for heritage art But that, after all, is the essence of column writing inflating a moment's thought, or absence of thought, into a theory Once you can't be bothered with the absurdity, then stop

So that's it then I'm outta here, if not forever, then for a long lie down in a metaphorical dark room lacking in music transmission technology Being a critic is a terrific method for killing your love of art. I like to be taken by surprise, hearing music I love in an unexpected place at an unexpected time and loving it all over again (like The O'Jays last night in a pizza restaurant, or Takemitsu's score for Kurosawa's *Ran* that I watched on an old tape when I got home, or the Dick Dale title sequence track in *Pulp Fiction*, shown on TV at an absolutely crucial moment in *Ran*'s final battle scene but demanding attention nonetheless) Most of all, I like the idea of having to say absolutely nothing afterwards As Toru Takemitsu wrote "There, confronting it, I resolved to face that silence as long as I can endure it." □

MAX LASSER

between (SW 069)

Harmony - melodic, rhythmic, lyrical, intricate, guitar blended to the 'Royal' degree in friendship of Jessica Lauren, Steve Arguelles, Pops Mohamed and the golden voices of Lulu Phadie and Paul Winfordy. Recorded in Johannesburg, 'between' is a perfect example of breaking down barriers, crossing cultural barriers and musical categories. A true expression of music communicating as a language for all people, and all time, the imagination of Europe, in the dreams of Africa for the ears of all.

ACHISA

Achisa (SW 067)

Achisa are from a boys home in the Long township on the outskirts of Cape Town, right next to a coal fired power station at the end of the airstrip at Cape Town's busy international airport. With this intense atmosphere and the production skills of Chris Weston and Greg Hunter, Achisa is a blend of Township jive and ambient dub overlaid with an edge of anger and irony, perhaps born from the gallows humour of living surrounded by a proliferation of AK 47's and well sharpened machetes. These are township Zulus having come through Apartheid, tasted contemporary technology and blasting their brilliant message across the world.

AMAMPONDO

Drums For Tommorrow (SW 068)

Amampondo consist of 10 virtuoso percussionists from South Africa, each taught by their forefathers the skills handed down from their ancestors on how to make drums and skins make different sounds. During certain sessions after hours of playing, the drummers reach a higher state of consciousness, at which point they are able to communicate back to their forefathers. As asking God directly for any favours is un-cool, they can however, once in this 'higher state', ask their forefathers to ask God any desired favour. Amampondo is drums and percussion as a way of life. A must for the dedicated.

POPS MOHAMED

How Far Have We Come (SW 066)

Pops Mohamed went deep into the Kalahari desert, buried a DAT recorder and attached a microphone ten feet into the air to record the sounds of a desert sunrise. The resulting early morning animal and bird noises are used as a background to 'How Far Have We Come' on which Pops tells stories of the desert, townships, African trance and our spirit's journey. Using traditional African instruments such as Kora and Mbira, Pops leads us into a musical journey of beauty, serenity and pure joy. This is a truly unique album from which you can almost taste the creativity and magic of musicians performing at a once in a lifetime event. Pops invited guests such as keyboard player Jessica Lauren whom he describes as having the sounds of the Victoria falls, Chris Bowden on saxes and Andrew Missingham on drums.

MUSIC WITH NO NAME

(SW 068)

A wildly eclectic remix collection featuring source material of Mel 2000's rich global catalogue. Remixers include Spring Heel Jack, Roni Size, Smith & Mighty, DJ Smash, Attica Blues, Ultramarine and the Moody Boyz among others.

BYRON WALLEN

Earth Roots (SW 067)

Absurdly talented composer and multi instrumentalist Byron Wallen gives us his second album, 'Earth Roots'... a journey through the sounds of Asia, American Indians, African and Arabic cultures. With the feel of an epic soundtrack, this is a journey which needs to be experienced fully, owing more to the filmic qualities of Barry Adamson, Jimi Tenor and Miles Davis than disposable pop! Freeform sounds, beats, poetry & music travelling together. Fluidity and diversity....Millennium time.

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